

THE INTERSECTION OF HIS AND HERS

交汇的人生

From Unsung Shanghai 上海 year/month/day

She

longtang life meant community
no fences, good neighbors
knocks next door— hear, crystal clear
every pearly peal of laughter
and fiery roar of temper
as if it were my own
wontons wrapped, cooked, and best of all
shared
sounds of feet, jumprope pound the ground
in rhythmic beating
jump/slap/jump/slap/jump
joyous hearts leaping abound
bound in community

longtang life had traditions
a new year of birth
saw grain and gift giving
a new year of earth
saw praying and praising to predecessors
the backdrop:
sturdy table shrouded in heavy incense clouds
lit by thinly flickering candlelight
serenaded by crackling firecrackers
the foreground:
blessings for family
prayers for gods of wealth
new year, same traditions

then came the cultural revolution

community, traditions, all silenced then
slaughtered
by the end of middle school,
here lay the stage:
my house a cage
the key an elusive freedom
for schools were closed and jobs were full
waiting—the only role to play
education a mask stripped aside,
a mere furrow passing away
at least my family was sheltered,
status quo was that status prevailed
“worker” safer than “landlord”
maybe the gods of wealth
knew the rich would not go unscathed,
that they would face the revolution’s wrath

He

longtang life meant rules
the neighborhood was safe but
parents will be parents (don’t stay out too late)
mine especially so
back upright, them uptight
make sure to uphold (don’t uproot or uproar)
even rules that say you were right,
and he was wrong,
but in a fight,
he’d have won
for a fight started was a departure from right
even when or if you were wronged
because rules were rules

longtang life had school
even during the birth of summer
cicadas accompanied by scratching pencils
and classroom lights glared down on
heads bowed diligently at desks
biting whiff of chalk dust clouds
a white sunset against the blackboard
between were respites
despite imprinted textbook in our minds
we trampled through mud
leaving handprints of childlike joy
as wild in nature,
as rigorous in school

then came the cultural revolution

old schools of thought banished,
upheaved
by the start of high school,
streets stirred with unease
awakened by an alarm
of seeping fear and time ticking nowhere
as school was dozed,
life spelled in a daze,
schooling not in math but revolution ways
the rules are binding
and times are hard,
family ties strained,
frayed, from the lashing of revolution
but I was a soldier, so I
must soldier on
(goodbye, mother)

Them

so life is static—
shocks of horror down their spine
as casualties pile up
they are not students anymore
they learn to wait,
a grim, grey droning

until they are pulled to their new jobs
a factory for electricity
and a harbor for two souls

they are assigned to the same division
behold a technicolor explosion
flying sparks of attraction
as they then find
a dreamscape
even in a nightmare
and the grey droning recedes
in the presence of a crescendo of love

their current lives set in motion
and so the story goes
before long,
they are humming melodies
to rosy cheeked cherubs

the cultural revolution a distant night behind them
(bleak vestiges still remain)
but it's a dawn of a new chapter, their lives float
lighter and brighter than before

because these are times of fear, yes
weary thoughts weigh down on wary minds
but times are changing— bad and good
their current lives soar with love
tender fruits of fruition
and all the while,
living standards flourish
(to have plumbing— and a toilet!)

they were the good old days, yes
the tight knit communities,
iron-clad rules,
ancient traditions,
and ever-present school

but the longtang life evolves
the apartment doesn't have
the same neighborhood as before

but the days now are good too
the two have weaved a new family,
forged their own trajectory,
a fresh bud starts anew,
and blooming despite old tragedy

