

## Acorn Leaves

Forgotten,  
the curvy, oily dark green of veiny acorn leaves,  
a *delicacy*, providence of Manchurian gods,  
her seasoned hands wrap them,  
around palm-sized dumplings with moist, juicy fillings.  
Steaming hot  
crowding metal pots and cheap ceramic bowls.  
Because their refreshing sweetness,  
sprinkled with a faint, nutty richness,  
supposedly had fairies drooling.

“What do you want to eat, grandson,”  
As she hurries to the kitchen where she will remain  
For *hours*

Forgotten,  
the heartening warmth of cast-iron radiators,  
with slowly burned mosquito coils.  
The whole family, a holler or ten steps away.  
Surrounded by folding tables and metal-tube stools,  
dusty wooden sofas with plastic-wrapped cushions,  
fear evaporated,  
along her boiling hot basin of feet-washing water.  
Bulging red envelopes, staying in bed,  
firecrackers lighting up the sky, *fai chuns* glowing red.

All night Mahjong, news on the TV,  
my first sip of *baijiu*, paid-for snack spree.  
My ecstatic self, clinging to coat sleeves and bedtime stories,  
Never disheartened, simply  
immersed  
in hefty, blissful, tender, lulling love.

Forgotten,  
smoldering incense for *snake god* and *immortal hedgehog*,  
muttered Manchu prayers, among an unsettling miasma.  
Three wisps of smoke drifting, lingering, so unlike  
the billowing fumes of flaming spirit money,  
and papyrus coins I hope she spends for herself.  
Three kowtows.  
Could never atone for the portrait not carried by her grandson  
down the lane of ribboned bouquets.  
Stiff legged, kneeling on the prickly old *zafu*,  
the piercing northeast wind slowly tore the warm reassurance,  
Out of my embrace.

*hours*,  
felt like a second when she hands me the sticky dumpling,  
“Eat up,  
there’s always more where that came from,”  
her chopsticks dancing in the air.