

Two Suitcases

HE CARRIED THEM UNTIL he couldn't. One, tall as a Chinese grandmother or an American girl, held his clothes: A soon to be insufficient coat, pajamas that had slept in his old bed with him. A suit, a pair of shoes, socks his mother had made in a mainland factory. The other, though smaller, was heavy. It was his library: Chinese-English law books, Chinese-English dictionaries, Chinese-English guides to conversation. A bag of preserved plums, a tube of digestive biscuits, several bottles of hair dye, ten white handkerchiefs, a packet of seeds.

If something happened, he could toss the large suitcase overboard, leave it in a garbage can. He had never seen an American garbage can but he could imagine it clearly. Not far from the dock, he set the suitcases down. He spoke to himself in Chinese. *Rest, then continue. Rest, then continue.* But the large one was awkward and the small one was heavy. Together they were impossible to carry further. It was too early to abandon them. He hadn't even reached the shore. There was the ocean liner in the distance. He gave his lunch money to a rickshaw boy and hoisted them onto the waiting cart.

Woo

CONFUCIUS SAID A TRUE education begins with poetry and so Woo began there. He used every spare moment he had to read poetry. He read poetry while he walked home from the courthouse, he read poetry while he cooked. Once, as a university student, he became so involved in the music of poetry that he plunged his left hand into a pot of boiling water in order to pull the noodles out while holding the book of poetry with his right. The poem had held his attention completely; it had been a poem about love. Not until he'd finished reading it did he see and then feel the scalding water blistering his hand.

The doctor wound a soft white bandage many times around it until it no longer resembled a hand but the paw of a great Arctic bear or a giant swab intended to clean the ears of a god. While she cinched the strips of gauze firmly into place and scolded him for his carelessness, his stomach growled and he remembered with irritation that in the midst of the sudden drama of his scorched hand he had left his book face down on the kitchen table and could not—though he longed to—re-read the poem until the doctor ceased her harangue and allowed him to go. She didn't relent until he was exiting her office and even then she called after him, "You're lucky it wasn't your right hand! Imagine that!"

He turned back to shake his paw at her but the pain, as he attempted to lift it, was unbearable. He shook his head at her instead, dislodging one of his cowlicks in the process. The strand bounced up and down

while Woo walked, cradling his white paw and muttering, *No consideration whatsoever! Doesn't she know I've suffered enough?!* When she'd shrieked at him, the first line of the poem had been on the tip of his tongue, like a candy he'd been about to taste, and now it was gone.