

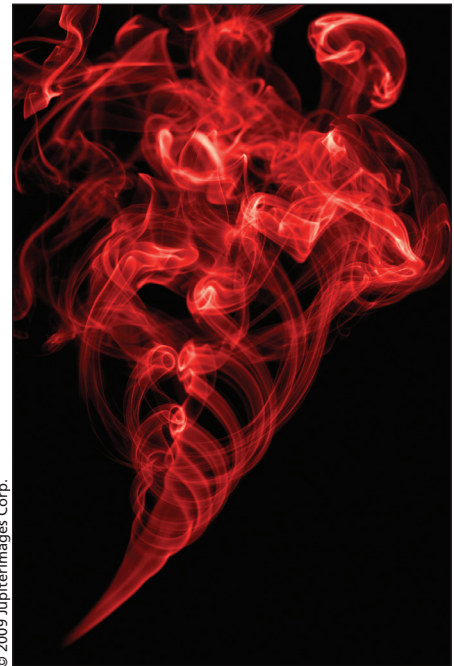
POEM

Spirit money

Sing did not believe in God, nor did he honour his ancestors as taught;
 He could shake the chills sent by the nonvenerated dead,
 Although he was not so lucky with the depression we battled for so long.
 A practical man's experience with death taught certain finality.
 But as I stood over his body, the need for some kind of preparation
 Overwhelmed me as heedlessly as tears clouded my vision.
 We were not religious men, so a prayer seemed a hollow mark;
 His ghost would be lost with two coins and certainly miss the boatman.
 In China, he told me about burning joss paper sacrifices, but what use as
 spirit money
 Were dollars from this new country, unwelcoming in his youth and
 indifferent now?
 I dimly recall my grandfather's death, when every family in the county
 Attended the wake, with food and drink and mournful song
 Through the night until the lowing of the cows called hands to the barn and
 fields.
 Sprawled on the floor, he must have dropped suddenly with little warning
 Before he could reach the bed; the overdose running too quickly for his plans
 I struggled to drag the corpse into more dignified repose, but my legs failed,
 Collapsing in a heap staring into his waxen face and stone eyes,
 I began to weep again as I dialed to fetch police and coroner, ambulance and
 hearse.
 Perhaps my flailing away, returning to the same concoctions, perhaps I
 hastened his death.
 Doctors fear death as a failure more than as some life-draining, pain-giving
 specter.
 A scythe would be easier to parry than this chilled flesh that sapped my own as
 we lay.
 His chart smoldering in the bin, I thought this was a decent gesture
 So that my memory of him could stand apart from those last days of struggle.

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