

Red Bean Soup

there were no *I love you 's*
never heard a *wo ai ni*
there was only red bean soup
on cold winter nights
past midnight, cramming for exams, stressing and scribbling
a creak of the door, the steam unraveling all around me
like a gentle ghost
zao dian shui, she said
left the bowl with a careful nudge
the earthy sweetness all around me, soft, just there
just enough
to comfort, enough to be
a gentle reminder
and she closed the door again, a soft creak
shutting it slowly, soft footsteps fade

there were no *I love you 's*
only packets of herbs from chinatown
with cicada shells, honeysuckle and chrysanthemum
ten paper bags all lined up
picked up on the way back from saturday practices and lessons
jostling in the back of the car

there were no *I love you 's*
only herbal tea
back from a long day, the door closes
bubbling away at midnight
steaming up the windows
filling the house with puffs of its strong scent
lingering, and when I wake up
the first thing to greet me in the mornings
strangely earthy, a bit of sweetbitter
is it strange to miss it now?

there were no *I love you 's*
only rice wine and *tang yuan* on saturday
with sesame and red bean
a special kind of sweetness
the best breakfast of the week!
dumplings, *xiao long bao*, roti with egg
an 8am treat

why would I sleep in? She says
when I can make you happy?

there were no *I love you's*
only stewed *ji tang*
a fragrant chicken soup
an all day kind of soup
the best kind that takes love and *xin teng* and all the good things in the world
all her love in a meal
everyone at the table for once
the best end to the week and the best start

and now
when there is no more
saturday morning *tang yuan* or stewed *ji tang*
on saturday, sunday, or any day
in the cold Boston nights I sit
craving late night red bean soup

a tap, a ring away
wei? ma?
miles away from home
missing the taste of red bean soup
is when I begin to say

I love you.