2012

You Stole My Heart (But I Guess I Left the Door Unlocked)

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Recommended Citation
Sleeman, Emma (2012) "You Stole My Heart (But I Guess I Left the Door Unlocked)," The Promethean: Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 37.
Available at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol20/iss1/37

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slumped Chinese woman dragged her burden through the sardined subway. The frail greying woman forced her free hand against strangers’ chests. With fingers outstretched and face pressed towards her bosom, she cried, “mama, meimei” (mother, little sister). With dim eyes still fixed on her own reflection, She pushed the sun-stained hand aside and noticed its tender warmth, cracked like oatmeal raisin cookies, and covered in peasant filth. When the vagrant dawdled past her, She inhaled with relief, then choked on the trail of powdered sweat, urine, and mud.

She wiped the dirtied hand on her pants and tried to wipe the woman from her mind. She bunched the loose denim on her outer thigh as her excuses curdled. That needy hand was warm, pulsing with humanity. She had been nothing but cold, expecting compassion to ignite her hollowed, complacent heart. She looked at her cheek, impressed with Apollo’s kiss and waited for the spark.

Notes from our judge:
The poetic and vibrant language used in this piece really makes it come alive. Each paragraph is filled with sensory words and descriptions that form an interesting perspective of the author’s world. Though the darker aspects of this story are made clear with blunt and concise descriptions by the narrator, they are entwined with lines such as “its tender warmth, cracked like oatmeal raisin cookies, and covered in peasant filth” that add brightness and a strange sense of hopefulness to painfully sad and broken images. This combination of sorrow and beauty draws the reader in and creates a hauntingly beautiful piece.