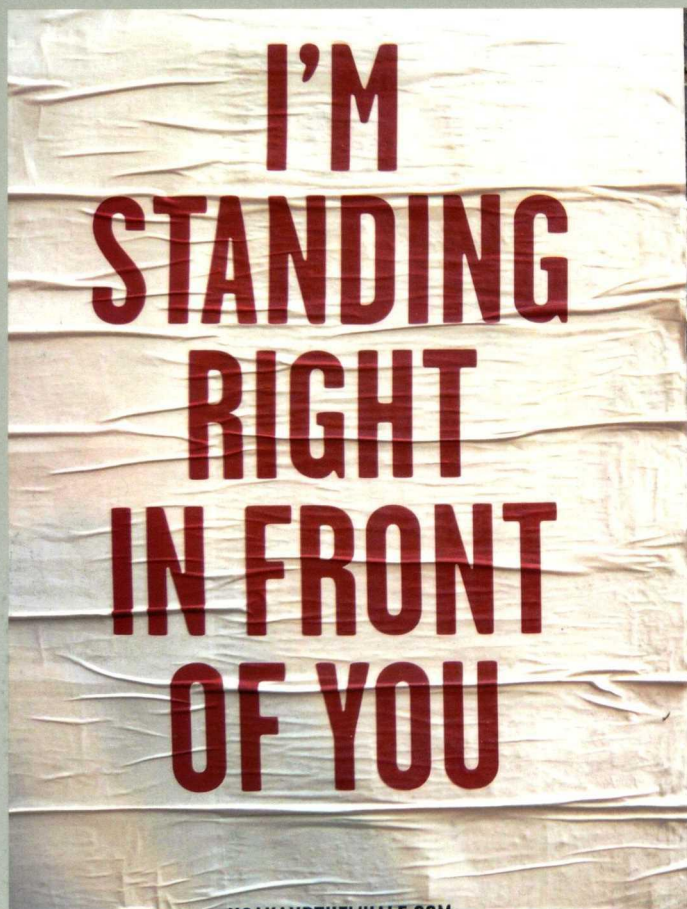


# HANGING LOOSE 104



\$11.00 US/CAN

## **Belief**

Mom gave birth to three girls. I was her last mistake.  
Grandma pointed at mom's nose: *You don't believe in God,  
He doesn't bless you!* Mom wrapped her daughters  
like three rotten eggs, fleeing out of Father's village.

Mom didn't say a word. She borrowed money  
from friends and enemies, paid off the debts  
Grandma had passed on to my parents,  
and launched her own business.

Now Grandma's flesh is drying, bones hardening,  
the Bible—only book in the house and she can't read it—  
cracking. Mom takes her to the hospital, paying for the surgery.  
Grandma looks up: *Thank you so much, God.*  
Mom hands her a stack of cash every month,  
Grandma cries out: *Lord, aren't you generous!*  
My sister gave birth to another boy, Grandma clapped her hands,  
shouting to her neighbors: *Jesus, my precious granddaughter  
just laid another boy! A double-yolk egg, what a holy gift!*

Mom doesn't say a word. She wakes early every morning,  
prepares breakfast for us, drives to the factory,  
checks the facilities, and waits for the workers,  
getting ready to run another busy day.



*Liuyu Chen*

## The Wakers

A clothesline, a dried well, a dog barks into the empty alley, a green pond echoes.  
The rooster wakes, clears his throat and crows, the village a little ruffled.  
A baby frowns in her sleep, turns, her hands hold tight her mother's breast, then let loose.  
The husband wakes, puts on pants and flip-flops to the toilet, memory slowly arrives.  
The door opens, a bucket of water poured from inside, footsteps shuffle and fade.  
A bicycle rings as it turns the corner, snaking to the construction site.  
The sky stretches, the moon yawns, erasing herself off rooftop branches.  
A few musical beats of clothes-washing rise from a flat stone by the pond  
where a woman squats, her cuffs rolled up, hair pinned back, soap suds breaking in the air.  
The stove wakes, firewood bickers, water in the caldron boils, smoke warms the chimney.  
Tea is ready, soft buns and rice soup now hot on the table, chair legs creak.  
Tricycles, motorcycles and bicycles carry farmers and their fresh-picked vegetables to  
the square.  
As they begin to shout the prices, pennies tossed into their tin boxes, the market wakes.  
The school wakes. The morning recital billows behind the open windows:  
"Spring is the prime time of the year. Morning is the prime time of the day."  
The old pull out their cane chairs, sit by the back doors, and chat with their  
lifelong neighbors.  
Her grandson who goes to college in Beijing just bought her fish oil that costs  
two hundred yuan.  
His granddaughter is going to marry the son of a profitable factory owner, she will  
do nothing  
but hatch a few sons. The fortune-teller has warned her not to wear dental braces,  
nor to eat spicy or sour, lest good fortune run away from her tiger teeth—common sense.  
The mahjong table wakes. Women play loudly with their fast hands, soon  
two circles of villagers gather to watch. Hulls of peanuts and sunflower seeds  
fall on the ground like small, dry leaves. The sun warms the sugarcane fields.

*Liuyu Chen*

## **Running around Washington Square Park on an October Night**

First, take in  
a few deep breaths,  
let autumn steadily fill  
your body. *Nose in, mouth out.*  
Cold in, warmth out. A car darts by.

Turn the corner, sharp odor of the dog run,  
then urine from portapotties. Fresh again.  
A dark figure lights a midterm cigarette outside  
the brownstone library. A yellow cab empty, stops,  
traffic lights in a daze. Coffee machine clunks.

Left turn, breath even. Catch a random conversation  
and drop it as easily. Chalk paintings discolored,  
don't step on them. Pigeon droppings Pollocked on the  
cement canvas. October leaves, frayed dollar bills.  
Drug dealers on their corners. You still hear  
notes hanging above where the park's pianist sits.  
Where does he live?

When you turn the last corner, ease your steps.  
*Washington at War, Washington at Peace.*  
Tourists are gone. Now walk slower.  
Feel this moment, feel it alone.  
A quick squirrel, a cold shrub,  
a damp moon skewered  
by a few dry  
branches.

*Liuyu Chen*

## The History of My Name

My name is *Chen Liuyu*. *Chen* is the family name I proudly inherited from the deep, dry riverbed of history, but *Liuyu* made me blush when being called on. *Liu* means *remained, left*. *Yu* means *jade, beauty*. My father gave me this name when he refused to trade me for a boy: my parents had two girls before me and had failed again. Ever since I could read and write, I hated my name: its dreadful sound, difficult spelling and offensive meaning. Then I made some friends at school, girls who were named 如男 which means *Equal (to) Boy*; or 胜男 which means *Superior (to) Boy*; or 笑男 which means *Laugh (at) Boy*, and I realized that my name is fairly delicate. I started to answer in a low voice when my teacher called on me in class, even though I never stopped giving myself other names—*Purple Jacaranda, Pleasant Heart, Little Fish, Wild Ivy*.

I grew up with and befriended a girl who was desperately called 招弟, which means *Give (me a) Boy*. She had been escaping from this curse all her life and her parents must have felt sorry witnessing her growing up, being laughed at so hard. When they finally got a boy—a bastard they bought from a far village who later became a criminal and is now in jail—they agreed to change her name to *Elegant Word*: she likes literature. While she strove to collect the debris of her lost dignity, I pondered my name but—like an old friend who I often disagree with but can't live without—I couldn't make up my mind to abandon it.

Actually, now, I have started to like my name. When you read it, *Chen Liuyu* is like three nods. American people have a hard time pronouncing *Yu*, which sounds like you're whistling as you ride a donkey at your leisure past a clear creek in a country field. When I write my name in ancient Chinese, it's like three delicately carved window panes: 陳畱瑜. Looking out my window, I have witnessed what my family has been through, what China has been through: soon after my birth, my grandparents swept my parents out of the village, and my childhood dawned in the city where early Chinese factories crowded, breaking every early day. Looking in my window, I have seen myself gradually becoming a certain kind of jade.

*Liuyu Chen*

## Husband Hunting Advice

"Not like your father—  
I came to this life to pay off my debt to him,  
but I gave birth to you with good intentions.  
Not from a village—I worked too hard  
to get out of it. Education ought to have some use.  
Nor from the big city—they are arrogant and stingy.  
Shouldn't be the only child—spoiled.  
Never the youngest—even more selfish.  
You want someone mature, fine, but not too old,  
or you'll regret it when you get to my age.

If you can't find one from our hometown,  
at least somewhere close, so that you don't have to divorce  
arguing about where to go on Lunar New Year's Eve.  
Never north, they talk too much with too little money.  
Foreigners are not allowed—as if I never gave birth.  
Plus, their ego outweighs their family. But Americans—  
get your green card and a loan for me.  
Are you still with the guy from that small country?  
Stop wasting his time. When you graduate,  
find a job and a man to give my life  
its ultimate purpose.

You will soon be too old for men to marry.  
Don't ever become one of those leftover women—  
they are all too educated and pretty.  
Men want younger, and less—  
you have read too many books."