



**THE KINGFISHER QUEEN**

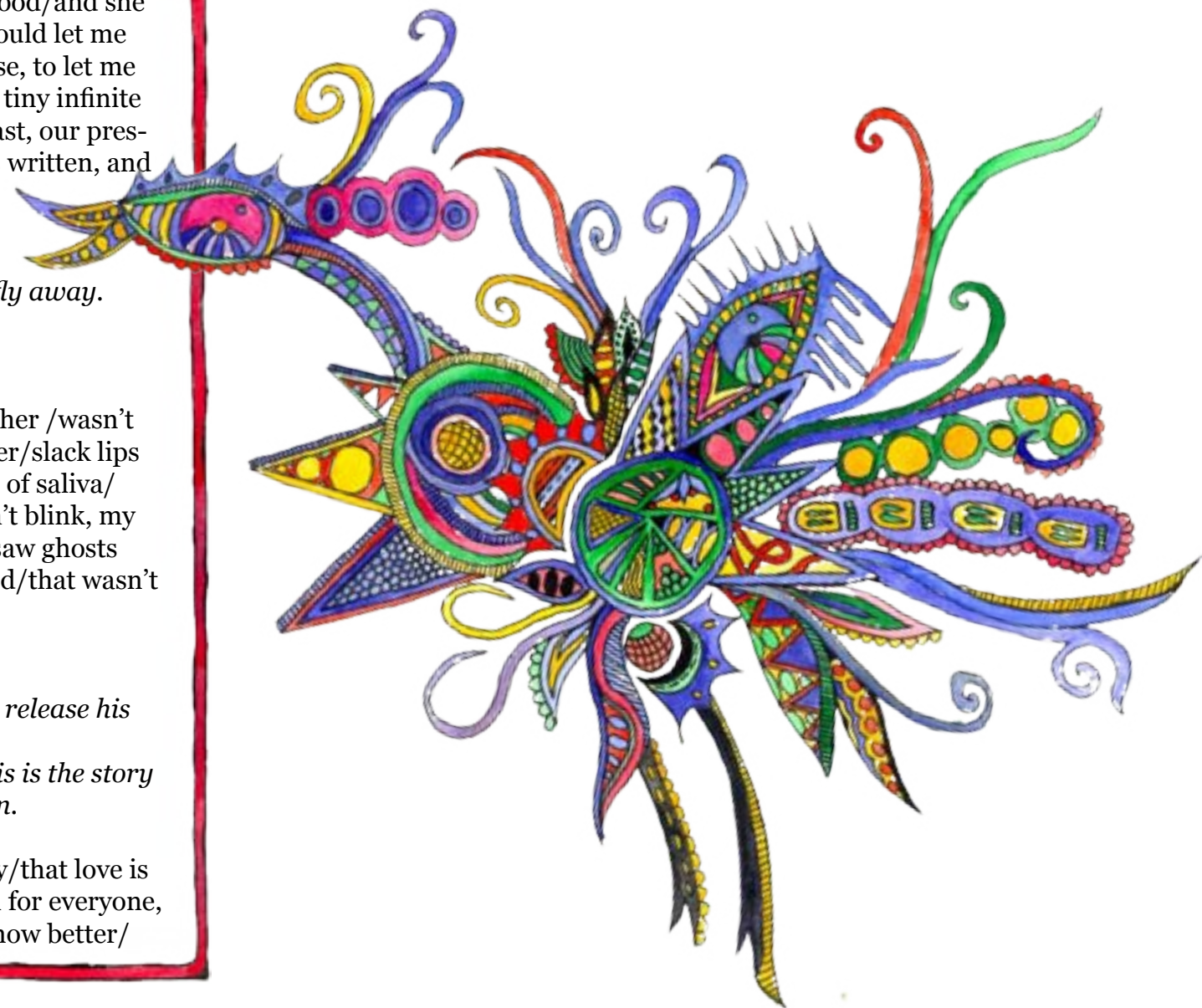
my mother kept her stories in/a black lacquer box that she had taken with her/ all the way from China/across the sea. If I was very good/and she was feeling well/she would let me open it/she would pause, to let me behold in wonder/that tiny infinite darkness, where our past, our present/our possibility was written, and then/she would begin

*Stories are like birds;  
it is in their nature to fly away.  
We release them so  
they will return.*

but most days, my mother /wasn't feeling well; I remember/slack lips streaming thin threads of saliva/ blank eyes that wouldn't blink, my mother/heard voices, saw ghosts from Old China, a world/that wasn't there anymore

*Rare indeed,  
the man who learns to release his love  
before it's too late! This is the story  
of the Kingfisher Queen.*

*lo fan* people like to say/that love is infinite/there's enough for everyone, all the time/Chinese know better/



love is like a well/you cannot see the bottom/but the water level drops in the time of draught/my mother/drew on the well of my love/ like she was dying of thirst

*Poor the peasant man who dreams of diamonds, indeed!  
He wanders about looking at the sky,  
distracted by stars  
while other men spend their time  
gazing at the ground:  
harvesting rice, pulling fish from the pond. But sometimes,  
the man who wanders at night  
may be granted the magic of the moon.*

when you're a poor Chinese girl, you can be little/but never young/especially when your mother's schizophrenic/trapped in the World of Yin/ imagine/me at ten years old, running down the streets of small-town BC/ Mama is three blocks ahead/screaming nonsense/moments like this/the world is a black lacquer box/nothing written on its walls/but emptiness

*Dai Tin walks alone at night, his head full of dreams.  
He comes upon a clearing, where the pond glistens, still*

*and dark. Look! A thousand feathers fall like rain.  
Lo, the Kingfisher Queen and all her train  
have come to bathe.*

she spent some days screaming/running from monsters only she could see/other days, she could barely rise from bed/baba and my oldest brother had to work/my little brother went to school /i took care of my mother/ changed the sheets she soiled/ dragged her to a chair/where she sat, staring at the window/like the sky held a secret/that could change our lives

*What miracles may be seen by moonlight, indeed!  
The Kingfisher Queen and her attendants  
have shed their feathers; now they are beautiful women.  
Dai Lo creeps to the bank and takes hold  
of the Kingfisher Queen's cloak.*

what i became in that house was determined/hard as stone/a jewel in my chest/i had to write my own story /one that would take me away from there/from the dark box of my moth-

er's madness/a story that could carry me away/like wings

*Frightened, the bird-women  
put on their feathers and scatter to the sky – all  
but the Kingfisher Queen, who has fallen in love  
with this poor earthbound mortal  
whose eyes are bright  
as the stars.*

so much of my love/drained dry by my mother's need/leaving only an empty space full of wanting/desire like a drum/beating the sound of tomorrow, tomorrow/i lived for tomorrow/for the day when my love/my life/could belong to me

*Enraptured, the lovers return to Dai Lo's cottage. For a while, all is well,  
but the Kingfisher Queen misses her kingdom.  
Pity, the bird who cannot fly! But Dai Lo is afraid –  
who is to say she will return? So he hides the feathers  
of his wife's freedom.*

i went to college/ studied anatomy and health sciences/just another

Asian girl/with glasses and a bag of  
textbooks /i learned so much about  
medicine/but found nothing that  
could heal that empty space/where  
the well of my love/was dry

*The Kingfisher Queen waits and  
dreams.  
In a year, she bears a daughter. Pity  
indeed,  
the child who is half the earthbound  
world  
and half the sky! Always searching  
for the secret  
of belonging, the girl spends her time  
playing in forbidden places.  
And one day, this rebellious daughter  
finds a box in the cellar –  
underground, where no bird would  
ever look*

in my last year of college/my mother  
died of cancer/i spent days trying to  
feel sad/wrenching salt water from  
the dry riverbed of my tear ducts/she  
left me two things: her black lacquer  
box/and a letter

*“What’s this, mother?” the little girl  
asks. Aha!  
Joyous indeed, the bird who at last  
may return to the clouds!  
The Kingfisher Queen, without a*

*thought, seizes her cloak,  
so long and dearly lost,  
and returns to the kingdom of heav-  
en forever. So it is,  
that love kept too long is lost. So it is,  
indeed.*

she left her money to my brothers/  
that’s the Chinese way /i felt so bitter,  
holding/that empty box in my hands/  
until i opened it/and found it wasn’t  
empty after all/it was full of feathers/  
my wings

*Stories are like birds;  
It is their nature to fly away.  
I give them to you,  
so that you may return.*

