

Two poems by Akiko Fujiwara

translated by Malinda Markham

The Day of First-Light

Together, we are severing things.
Grasping hands, walking doorway to doorway
through a scene screened from view,
we follow my father.
Thoughts of a flower bent backwards 0211
run rampant. Echoes break
in one corner of the field. As breath pours out
to the water's edge just to survive,
it fades into nothing at all.

Wrapped in white, the two vehicles
signal each other. If we could run
to them, we could protect the bent flower 0208
that waits in the quietly-entering Next.
Soon, the lowered hand will inscribe the gap,
the gap that sleep believes in.

In a field of people and anemone flowers,
beneath the branch where my mother
is not, the doubting eye
cups Time just before it darts away.
That day, joyful laughter in the schoolyard 0418
died out. We left our weakness
on the shore, so far away,
its gaze could never reach us.

I watch you and do not let myself speak.
Our shaken hands rise steeply up until the moment
of release, release. We believe in the flower 0211
only as it leaves us. The gap,
inscribing the gap.

Squint

Peaches. Scratching wildly
where the knots converge. Now the words
that cover the fevered axis can turn
toward something to protect:
Because it keeps the figure deep
within the heart and safe,
the beautiful curved line becomes
the happiness of picking.

The fingers of children with crushed spines
do not know how to spin
a voice into thread.
They gaze at death's shore. Days
upon days of gentle breath—
 Steeped in peaches,
they dreamily wrap their arms
around far-alone skin.

If all the strangled things were kept from crying out,
then the strained painful breath
inside the layers of wounds
could expand.

Peaches. Scoop up
 the fallen flowers
of grown children. The scent of water
lingered on the wrists
and in the body's organs and narrow pipes. For a moment,
it approached the buds (they'd breathed),
almost close enough to touch,
then lamplight cut across the children.
The light
mimicked the act of picking
the long-sought shadow of a stem.

Happiness welled in its throat.

A weak warmth wraps only around the details
we drag behind us in chains.
If we stitched one of the fragile, vanishing, empty knots
whole again,
wouldn't the crying stop? Whatever it was that called
from deep inside:
let its wings rest.

(If a memory disappeared when touched—)

Harshness springs forth until it overflows.
it tells us that the dead body
With the pounding heart
is awake. Like a curved flowing line,
realization gently pecks
at the longed-for throat.

 Drowning in peaches—
After something has been culled
from inside the stem's shadow,
there is no chance that the crying will stop.

Akiko Fujiwara was born in Kyoto Prefecture in 1974. After graduating with a degree in Photography from the Osaka University of the Arts, she began focusing on writing poetry. In 2001, she won the prestigious annual poetry award from Gendaishi Techou, a major poetry journal in Japan. Since then, her work has appeared regularly in that journal and in others. Her first book of poetry will be published by Shoshi Yamada in January 2005.

Malinda Markham's first book, *Ninety-five Nights of Listening*, won a Bakeless Award and was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2002. Recently, her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Conjunctions*, *Fence*, *Jubilat*, *American Letters & Commentary*, and *3rd bed*. She recently returned from spending 4 years in Tokyo, where she worked as a full-time university instructor and then was a Blakemore Language Grant recipient. Her literary translations and an essay on translating from Japanese have appeared in the *Antioch Review*. She currently lives and works in San Francisco.

