

Until the Burial

Yesterday, my father dug out the roots of the dead tree in the yard.
Yesterday, he planted a plum tree,
young and veinless, the bark so thin that I can peel off strips and fold paper cranes
so the tree can grow wings
when its leaves are soaked dry of purple bruise, when its bitter juices seep into the ground,
the cold begins to pierce through the stale air
and into empty branches, I think more and more of the paper scars on his hands,
how his skin is a web of blistered veins and hardened calluses
how winter burns into his mournful laugh, when at last I am the one breathing in frostbite
spreading from limb to limb.

A year ago, my father cut off the stems of the withered flowers in the house.
A year ago, he potted orchids,
pale and spineless, the petals translucent in the sun like a sheet of paper held towards the light
I can soak the pieces in saltwater,
so the ink bleeds outwards into the threadbare curtains, so the dye of fabrics fade through glass,
so in February I begin to imagine
red embroidery on his eyes before the orchids bloom, a spring without snow but the rain is always
something he never forgets,
through the whistle of the boiling kettle, the bird cries heard at waking, I knew I was too young
to remember meeting him.

When I was younger, my father tore out the pages from the wrinkled coloring book.
When I was younger, he drew a forest
on the empty and creaseless pages left inside, graphite smudging onto his bony knuckles
like sketches of ash and soil
that littered the grass with cast aside feathers- the scraps of these snow-blown paper cranes
we used to fly like kites,
until his hands were caught in the strings, as the birds tugged on his swaying, dancing frame,
and I could almost see
a plum tree, an orchid, and a forest, all blooming and yellowing underneath the weak sun
like strange corpses from the sky.