The Blind Massage Parlor on Maizidianr Street

Doctors Han and Wang run the love heart massage in one of Beijing’s two and a half billion broken alleys.

“You’ll recognize it by the red awning,” Dr. Han says on the phone. And when I do, I wonder who told him.

Later, on one immaculate bed in a row of seven, I feel Dr. Han’s fist wedge between two innocent bones in my shoulder.

He accompanies the soundtrack of my gasping with a simple statement: “We hated Titanic.”

I shift my weight on the straight, white table. And arch my eyebrows, a gesture Dr. Han overhears.

He rests his right hand for one thoughtful moment on my spine, and explains. “The story was stupid with its music. Your American Hollywood knows what about love? Nothing in that movie fit.”

I make shy eye contact with the client in a bed across the row. We are the only two here today. I think she loves Titanic from the delicate way she lifts her neck to look at me, confused.

I smile and replace my face into the massage table’s dark head hole. Maybe Dr. Wang and Dr. Han also smile - at each other over us, because Dr. Han says “we’ve been married for eight-teen years. We feel what other people just see.”

Only after Dr. Wang, his wife of eight-teen years, giggles like a movie star in love, does he turn his attention and hands back to me. “These days we have a lot of foreign clients!” he remarks, “How do you say in English: Does this hurt?”
In our poetry section we look at the work of poets with both Asian and Jewish connections. While some of the poems we include will tie together both Asian and Jewish themes, or will be inspired by only one of these themes, we want our poetry section to be broader than that. As our poets show, Jewish writing does not only focus on Jewish topics but is often subtly colored by the warmth and humanism that imbues Judaism as a whole.

This will be a regular section in the magazine and we are looking to expand our pool of poets. Please send your poetry in for consideration to submissions@asianjewishlife.org.

Poetry
by Rachel DeWoskin

Foreigners

There’s a language for other languages. Burning my bedside table is a red dictionary. Nightlight, guided, partial escape from my fear of this illiteracy I live in a dark constant: wonder. Is everything simple or is emptiness another misunderstanding? Beside me, tea has steeped all day uncovered. I sip slow, still it soaks my mouth with cold, leaves the faint taste of letters I can’t read.

Beijing Awake

Dark, our constant wonder, understands this city’s list of questions. It demands the morning be brought on again. The town’s awake, its pavement smell of sun alive, the rounds of vendors under windows call up all their offerings - fried dough, soy milk, the vowels move over awnings into spaces that we make for days. How many noons will pass while we play life? Until the ruins of buildings, bridges, neon lights strung highway-side short out, we rise. Today stall covers roll up, wide, a spray of light, fruit, spice, hot words we use for trade. The pork bikes make a metal sound, meat splayed across their fender racks, they wheel to luncheonettes for garlic, sweet and sour sauce, cilantro. We shop markets for their patterns: feathers flutter from the block, stretched necks suggest both flight and stock.

Rachel DeWoskin is the author of the forthcoming novel Big Girl Small (Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011), the critically acclaimed novel Repeat After Me and a memoir, Foreign Babes in Beijing, which has been published in six countries and is being developed as a feature film. Rachel has published poems in a number of magazines. Her awards include an American Academy of Poets Award and a Bread Loaf Writer’s Conference Fellowship. She is an artist in residence at Teachers & Writers and teaches creative writing at NYU.