**The Chinoiserie Wallpaper**

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Tonight, I am thinking about my grandmother’s chinoiserie wallpaper

in her living room, fern green with peacocks. We used to sleep like two

spoons on her pullout sofa. The men in flat hats on her wall

were bowed, yoked to buckets of water; under the street

light’s glow, the scene looked exotic. I was six,

and the man from Sear’s would come to your home,

panting satchels of samples up your front stairs, sweating

Camel smoke, sprawl on your pull-out, ask you what kind of look

were you going for—Orient, Confederate, Country Inn,

or Garden Club? He had my Granny pegged for Patriotic, since

she told him she worked on Capitol Hill, but she had travelled

to Brazil, wanted something expansive. I thought the wallpaper

was the height of glamorous, right out of Readers’ Digest.

And when my Granny bought sheets for the pull-out

that almost matched the wallpaper, I couldn’t sleep—

tracing my index finger along the peacock’s plumage, the pagodas,

and the pandas. Why do I dream of that wallpaper even now?

You are dead 35 years. And that chinoiserie, we slept under its

reductive Western Hemisphere facsimile 60 years ago. I had not

travelled as far as Connecticut, did not understand oppression. You

overflowed with laughter, opening your umbrella in the foyer,

grabbing my hand and your purse as we headed to your office

on Saturday. How is it that time has not faded the paper,

caused it to peel from the wall? As I pass from breath into death

will I step past the pull-out in your living room one more time?

Will you take my hand along that path by the garden—the one

by the pond where the koi sleeps under the lotus,

where the egret is singing—where you told me you’d

wait if we ever were separated?