**We Can’t Be Still**

Jennifer Blake

Swimming up Chinatown, rushing through arms and pink bags: step, step, up, up.

*I wish.* Step, breath. *I wish I knew what to do with these.* A bag of dried shrimp, curled, pink with fright. Squeezes the bag and laughs with the crunch. She grabs his wrist.

*Don’t touch!* Single file up the sidewalk, fingers grasping, losing, finding again. She sweeps the other hand through a bin with the force of the moon, makes a ginseng wave.

*Don’t touch,* he mocks. Refuge on a rock in the human river, she kisses him and runs. Up, up, around, breath caught around the corner. She bends, laughs, watches, hoping.

She sees him, smiles—home. Ducks drip in windows, sweet and sour skin. *One day,* they say, necks twisting as they flow on, on. Tourists are tangles of reeds and litter making eddies of old women with choy sum.

Red lanterns are bait dangling above, the biggest things in the gray sky, they want to jump and catch them, be taken away through the air. It would be the last thing they did, but how wonderful to fly!

Instead, they fall. A downhill. Feet roll in a waterfall with sidewalk wash and fish tank runoff. *We never cross the bridge,* she says. Silver and cheerful, it grows out of the bay, throwing the only ray of sun.

*Never say never,* he crows.

Tea stands are resting pools. No one to receive her offering, the proprietress pours herself onto the counter, watches the tide, sees the two and watches their frantic swim, and she knows.

Gray and green, old men with racing forms are solemn willows, sitting stern in bright bakeries, elders holding back erosion. Do not enter.

Waterfall of two splashes down at the main drag of cafes. Teas bubble, espressos flow. Licking steam buns and cannoli from the air, they kick along the street like the neon ladies up Broadway.

*There’s a time capsule in the park,* he whispers to her. *We’ll be here when they open it.*

*Will we?*

*2079. We’ll be here in sixty years.* They squeeze between sidewalk diners and parking meters, conform like seafoam, *and beyond and* race the traffic current and leap back to safety *beyond*.

They stop for wedding cookies, pastel and butter—the full impact of cool air and hot sugar. They breathe with their mouths and grab the bags, stick their noses into them.

*There are so many kinds,* she says*, you’ll have a different one every day when—*

*When we go to Italy.*

Parrots in trees mock them for gravity, chatter and drop berries. They spread their wings and chatter back, mock the parrots for being less colorful than they.

*Up here from the top of the hill,* she tells him, gripping, this eternal tree, *from the hill you can float straight through the air to the top of that building.* Lifts a foot and goes tiptoe with the other, closes her eyes,

A bed…

The day they found out…

And decided to run…

And live forever.

Water needs water. Coursing down the hill on the other side, quietly, because here people sleep and bathe and argue, sit in polygons of air and bask in themselves. They run their fingers along cold walls, swipe silken blossoms from rebelliously bursting bushes. Steps quicken, fight the hill. Coalescing with ancient energy, gathering leaves and fumes and words and now and before and soon, ready to create and destroy, they crest and tumble to the shore.

*It’s silver!* he sings. Water on the horizon busily sparkles.

*It’s diamonds,* she says.

*It’s moving.*

*That ship,* he breathes. *That’s for us.*

*Can’t we just swim?* She bends, scoops sand, changes the world a little.

*We have to swim, a little, to reach the ship.*

*We’ll sink.*

A bed. Sand in her fingers is rough cotton. *We’ll sink.*

He pushes her into the waves.

They are so buoyant that they are surprised and resist. Water knows them as water. Where they look, they suddenly are. There are colors that need names. There are beings that rise from explosions and eat light. He captures some light in his hand and feeds her.

Looming, like a planet, is the boat before them, a great slice of shadow. A ladder appears, a ladder of light, being light themselves they climb it and pierce the air.

*There’s no one,* she says, frightened.

*Of course,* he laughs. *This is ours. Now we’re safe.*

*Safe from what? What do you mean?*

*The dreams. Don’t you remember?*

*Dreams.*

Tubes, needles.

*Where nothing ever happened,* he explains. *Where we were still. I was still. Everyone held their breath and stared.*

*Yes,* she remembers*. I was there. You were still.*

Gulls are a veil over them, hovering in time with the ship. The sea sprays them, water longing for water.

*We don’t even have to steer,* he says. *Just think it, and we’ll be off.*

*Australia,* she tells him. The boat does her bidding, turns easily like the point of a compass.

*Japan,* he says, grinning. The boat lunges the other way.

*Just wanted to see if it would work,* he says.

She hits and kisses him*. Back to Australia.*

They let the boat carry them, and they rest. They are safe.

He closes his eyes, leans against her as they lay on the deck. Peace. She rests but her blood still rushes, heart pounds in her ears, makes sure she knows it’s there. She reaches to feel his, can’t quite find it, touches this place and that on his chest.

*I didn’t want to tell you where we’re really going,* he whispers.

*Where?*

He embraces her, her eternal tree.

*Don’t worry. We’ll be together still.*

*Where?* she repeats.

*I’ll be OK.*

He becomes heavy in her arms. *To where? Where? Where?*

She jolts. The world is still and quiet.

*Do you really have to go?*