**Indian Asters and Shepherd’s Purse**

Lucie Chou

*In three words I can sum up everything*

*I’ve learned about life: it goes on.*

*—Robert Frost*

*after Denise Levertov—*

*“miner’s lettuce / tender, untasted”*

Then at the other edge of the field

on the other end of the world,

in China, sun at summit, westering,

early September, I feel the pain again

of imponderable

beauty.

The cadenzas of calendulas and zinnias,

galloping glissandos of color

crashing every hour of day

into one star map:

dawn lavender, morning mauve,

midday’s gamboge yellow,

maple syrup of four pm,

distilled and mellow.

Cosmos, namesakes of the world,

regal purple, ruddy realgar.

Dahlias, cinnabar.

My sight singed, every blaze

a scimitar. A butterfly with weary wings

on a wooden walkway of the park.

Its fragile bluish silver

flits to Indian aster. Lilac eyelashes

round apricot pupil.

Squatting quietly,

I want to stay its shadow.

Standing up to walk on

reveals more clusters of bloom:

Autumn’s morning star,

Indian aster.

Once my family gathered wild greens,

sallying out to waysides,

weedlots, margins of surging

wind-waving wheat fields

before the buds burst

full fire

for a first tender taste

of thinly fuzzed leaves.

One degree of pungent,

one degree of sweet,

the rest all umami

elusive as an itch in a phantom

limb. We dug with bent spoons,

washed dirt from roots,

soaked pale slender napes swished

by wavy luscious hair. We let them

roll on our cutting board.

We squeezed them into tight balls,

reserving the juice for drizzling

sparassis mushrooms.

We made wild greens dumplings

with shiitakes and tofu.

No, that was not September,

but spring. Not aster, but

another feral fairy

fittingly named

Shepherd’s Purse.

Grandfather took us on foraging trips,

tenderly passing on wild greens

savvy: *search for the tender ones,*

*before flowering, before growing*

*those little flat triangular purses*

*from which Lilliputians purloin*

*fairy gold at night. The tender ones,*

*bloomless, penniless, are best.*

*Graze your tastebuds*

*and they bleed green sunlight.*

His body is ten years

in eclipse now. For twenty

before his heart stopped stark,

he cared for grandmother

who survived him then

succumbed to Alzheimer’s. She coughed

and coughed, could not clear her lungs.

In the commons he cultivated

wild dandelions, harvested,

combed them with long white teeth

of water, dried them,

made her daily teas to melt the phlegm.

His body is ten years

in the earth now. The earth

that greens with weeds

every year, faithfully,

without fail. He pointed out

the Indian asters to us,

but we never saw their roots

washing clear of earth

in his stout knobby fingers,

or their green turning transparent

in boiling water. We would never hear him

tell us whether we should never

wait until the pale purple lashes

flap open. Whether then, in full bloom,

it would be too late

for the most soothing, soft, youthful taste.

What he knew about Indian aster

dumplings we have to search for

in online recipes.

But now, right now, in late afternoon

sun, as silver flakes flutter

their shadows over ebulliently

blooming asters, I’m not thinking about

tongues of short-tailed blues

siphoning nectar from phials

that have just been sprinkled.

I’m not thinking about everything

the clear streams out of our faucets

cannot wash off,

everything beautiful

and tasty we don’t put into

our mouths now. I’m closing my eyes

to a field of sheer warm light,

a flower field, a family gathering

of the Daisys. Dandelion, chicory,

cosmos, zinnia, aster. The little cress,

with foamy flowers and little purses,

welcomed as a family friend.

It’s home. It’s safe.

It’s abstract, nothing

but light. When the sun tilts a little

lower, by four thirty, I will go in

as the light turns flames dimmer, dimmer,

to make Indian aster dumplings

with mother, father, father’s sister,

what remains of my family on earth.

We ordered our greens

grown in glasshouses. They will

taste somewhat dimmer

than paradise but not

without love for life. And I will breathe in

a last gasp of dazzling green, gold,

mauve, magenta from you, dear daisy sisters,

brothers, all of you, before I go.