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POETRY | FALL 2016

## Family as Six Scenes

By Ting Gou

1.  
a bed catches on fire and a person  
runs down hospital stairwells  
crosses asphalt / wears a thin shirt / the summer  
clings to her wrists

2.  
the same woman becomes my aunt /  
becomes a storyteller / is painting for me  
the famous scene from every fairy tale /  
the hero hurrying toward disaster  
toward a burning building or person  
or in some cases toward someone  
not yet dead / but dying,  
asleep under glass / or alone in a tower

3.  
after ten years, I've returned home,  
I'm in the hospital where my grandmother died /  
and her daughter, my aunt,  
has guard duty tonight in a tiny room  
above cardiology and as we wait  
to be called about theft, weapons, disasters,  
she tells me how three years ago  
across the courtyard  
in a patient's room  
a cigarette burned a crater the size  
of someone's face  
into the bed and as she laughs  
I could smell the smoke rise from the walls

and she laughs and laughs and laughs

4.  
same scene, where nothing is happening  
as we wait / no burning cigarettes this time, no alarms,  
no frantic stuttering from the other mouthpiece  
of the phone hanging motionless  
like a broken limb / past midnight, past 3 am,  
past when I could stay awake and watch  
my aunt comb her black hair  
shorter than mine but darker

5.  
what I mean to say is,  
I think I fell asleep,  
stepped out of my body,  
became something like fire

what I mean to say is,  
my aunt is a stranger  
with stories of smoldering cigarettes

what I want to tell you,  
the family comes together only  
in times of disaster,  
gathers what's crumbling at the edges

6.  
in my dream yesterday,  
there was paper crackling and a face  
like my aunt's, or my mother's,  
their bodies guarding a metal pail  
brimming with the ash  
of offerings,  
perfect replicas for use  
in the afterlife / gold coins, clothes,  
jewelry for my grandmother /  
no one says her name /  
no one says anything but  
my aunt has in her hand a house  
folded from red and blue paper /  
it slips from her fingers into the bucket /  
lights up / glows / I watch  
the wind carry the pieces into the arms  
of some ghost

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**Ting Gou is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Michigan Medical School, interested in psychiatry and the relationship between memory and identity. Her first chapbook, *The Other House*,**

was selected for the Delphi Poetry Series at Blue Lyra Press and was published in 2016. Her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart three times and appear in the Bellevue Literary Review, Best of the Net 2014, decomP, Ghost Ocean Magazine, Midwestern Gothic, r.kv.r.y., Superstition Review, and Word Riot. You can also find her poems in JAMA, Chest, Anesthesiology, Medical Humanities, and elsewhere. She is a poetry reader for The Examined Life, a literary magazine published by The University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine.

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