

Miluo*Tracy Bowling*

It's always moving, that river.

They wondered for many years if it could do anything else. Qu Yuan, the scholar, sat under orange trees and gazed at it, day after day, how it shifted restless like men in their beds, like kings and their loyalties. He watched and wondered when it would trip or stall or rush ahead to its destruction in the muddy, desert depths of the great yellow river. Behind its banks men shrined themselves in bronze and toppled, iron fistfuls stained with gold. Qu Yuan cast stones into the river, though he knew they would not be returned to him. He wondered if sometimes the river quenched the thirst of dragons.

Miluo drew him in, as it has others. When he began to look too hard at water lilies, they whispered at a mind so distracted. When he began to write, they feared Qu Yuan, the poet, the revolutionary. They watched him as he stood by the river's edge, clothing himself in its watercress and braiding magnolias into his beard.

The armies flowed from east to west, spreading like silt across lawless, untamed lands. Beyond the blood-choked battlegrounds Qu Yuan, the exile, walked under willow trees, watching the river. He felt the whirlwinds close behind him and wondered if sometimes the river sprung forth like chariots drawn by horses made of thunder.

When Qu Yuan leapt into Miluo he did not hope to find out where it ended. It's always moving, that river, and if you glide from west to east it will take you, changing course and color in the fading light of the sun. It returns, day after day, with no sign of the scholar, but they have not stopped watching for his body. They have not stopped throwing stones at the fishes who would feast on his garments.

They have not stopped wondering for many years, in hopes that, when the river stops, their thinkers shall be returned to them.