

Shadow of Breath by Jennifer Wong

What a thing we like to make of that
Shadow of breath.
It is the missing block four
Of any prestigious residence.
The way we avoid going outdoors
On a certain summer evening of
Ghost festival.

It's the way we get confused
By welcoming shop signs saying
"Celestial pleasures" or "eternal living"
Nestled between tuck-shops and stationery stores
In the middle of Shanghai Street.
I heard that people went there
For quality timber and for craftsmanship.

When I was a kid I used to think
They were toy shops – all those
Suspended paper houses, paper dolls,
Paper shirts and even mobile phones.
I didn't know until the day I saw
Someone burn them right after purchase.

I didn't know what to do
With the packet I received after the service:
A coin, a candy, and tissue paper.
So much like a riddle, or a prayer.

How strange it feels.
It's absence we don't talk about.
Everywhere there are telltale signs of it,
Kind reminders
Of its proximity.

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