

LIST

POEMS

MOONSHADOWS

JEN SOOKFONG

叶蓁

THE
HILL

THE JEN SOOKFONG
LEE
SHADOW
POEMS LIST

Also by

**JEN
SOOKFONG LEE**

FICTION

The Better Mother

The Conjoined

The End of East

NON-FICTION

Gentlemen of the Shade

Whatever Gets You Through

CHILDREN

The Animals of Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year

Finding Home

Shelter

LIST

POEMS

MADYAS

JEN SOOKFONG LEE THE HILL



A Buckrider Book

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For **ANDREA,**
CAROLYN
and **CARRIE**



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INTRODUCTION

This is what you'll need to understand:

Cameron Crowe is to blame for everything.

Sunshine is an insult.

You may never learn to swim but so what?

A dog is the love of your life.

The pretty poems are dead inside.

*

The books are the only things you have left
behind that make sentence-by-sentence sense. You think,
Hearts break all the time, but that doesn't come close
to explaining away the vomit in the toilet from crying
then drinking and then crying again,

or the bone-deep certainty that, when this ends,
people will say, *She was full of life, a loving friend*,
when you know it's only half-true or maybe not even.
You deserve punishment, self-inflicted or otherwise.

*

The hearts you break matter less and less (this is a lie, see above).
Your greatest worry is that your son
will grow up to be just like you.
Laundry doesn't fold itself.
You still don't know what *doubling down* means.

*

You can shout anything you want
through the open windows: warnings, spells, limericks.

The wind will suck it all up, turn every wish or curse
meaningless as they are blown into fragments, hurled
against power lines and trees dying from the tops down.

There is a purpose to this, of course: it is the act
of casting them outward, of yelling so loudly that your
body caves inward with the effort, your abdominals
hard as stone for the first time ever.

This is necessary.

Without it, you would stay soft and silent, curled
like a baby mouse in holes too small for a human thumb.

*

Protect your child, even though you know you can't.
Being smarter hasn't helped much.
Stand up straight.

*

So you will always try. There is no alternative, is there?
You can beat at winter for weeks and weeks
and spring will eventually arrive and you can trick
yourself into believing it came for you.

The sharp tips of crocuses, the dawn, the thickening light,
all because you called them into being with your rage,
with the furious living you did in the winter dark

(mascara like ashes, satin
underwear, unfamiliar musk in your hair and mouth).

This violence, this volume
is how you will try to change what seems like fate.

✱

Fearing the outdoors keeps people alive.
Never trust the man in the long coat.

*

Tread softly, your friends say. Be quiet.
And you laugh because you have heard
this your whole life, even as you cracked
your knuckles and hurled your phone
into a public street and combed last night's
sweat through your hair with grubby hands.

Writers are supposed to be introverts.
And you laugh even harder.

*

The hurt will fuck you up
but you will appear fine and this,
above all else, is your gift.