

ezra f. baeli-wang

BRACING

My father once poured a cup of tea
over his shoulder and onto my head,
as I held him from behind.
Room temperature chamomile.
I held him only so that he would not leave —
without love

Do you ever think about holding people?
The ones that aren't there, weren't
ever — always are? What it means
to wrap your arms, those hinged
and swinging flails of bone
and blood and Jesus have
you ever really looked
at your arms?

I didn't let go. After the tea, I mean.
After the initial wet that felt like cold,
the blinking and sputtering. I might
have even asked him if he had done it,
if he had really just done it like that,
just the way that he did, with the tea bag
and all — dark, wet heap of leaves staining
the carpet a honeyblossom pond.

I was on a raft in a river on 龙王山 —
it's not the same if you say it in English
because it means Dragon King Mountain,
but 龙王山 is so green and solemn
and I was there, not alone, and it was raining
right on the river, and I was so wet and the rain
and the river tasted nothing like tea, but I drove
my bamboo oar into the roaring emerald stipple
and held my father
still