

NR
American Academy of Poets Winner - Kerlan Wong

Out Late Saturday Night

My mother sits
On the couch
In darkness
Waiting for me

Where have you been?
She asks
Her stern Chinese
Countenance frowning

Upon me.
Do you know
What time it is?
She says

What time it is--
Late. I say
Flashing my
Careless American attitude.

All the other kids
At school
Do whatever
They feel like

My mother heaves
A defeated sigh.
A rebellious daughter
With an American mind

Where did this
Come from?
Who taught you
To talk back

To your mother?
My head drops
and my blood pulses
Under Chinese skin.

Have I tossed out
Generations
Of elderly
Asian respect

In one night.
Devastating a dynasty's
Worth of tradition
And values?

Have I crushed
The dark jade.
Stained with secrets
And ancient wisdom?

The severed roots
Dangle before me
My mother
Holds them

In her small,
Yellow hands.
With the soul
Of China

Still clinging.
Fresh clumps
Of earth
Fall through

The gaps
Between her
Fingers
I can't

Catch them.
They're slipping
Too quickly
For me to hold.