

### Writing With Water

This morning watching the master practicing in the East Garden, near my office. I stop. Listen. He is bending, writing, students watching. No one speaking. Mid-morning, early November, roses still bloom. I walk this way to walk with them, speaking red, yellow, pink. Chinese roses my students assure me. You should see them earlier. Look how tall they are. Do you like them?

*China rose petals  
falling from November tops  
pink on yellow red*

He uses a large brush, long handle, worn, no hint of black remaining. A tea jar with water, not clear, two-thirds full, open, cover not near by. He writes on the cement of the park pavilion. Open green, curved stone walking bridge, oval pond, some gold fish near by. The bridge is for lovers they tell me. Already another dusty, dry day. Thin breath of the Gobi moves as the water moves forming each stroke, running into each new character. Students part to make room as I move closer. He motions, calls me Laoshi, teacher. He offers me the brush. My head shakes. No, you are Laoshi. I don't know what my mouth says. I can feel the *O* of my lips. He offers again. As I smile *no* with my hand the students smile. There I am. Holding the brush. I tell him, I have a Chinese name, the only character I know. When I pronounce it he doesn't listen. He points to the pavement. I notice his characters are fading. People are walking by. Even the ginkgos are watching.

*Ginkgo biloba  
walking through the East Garden  
memorizing now*

I stand brush in hand. Practice. Holding the brush. I draw in the air. Everyone is quiet. Everyone watches. My movement becomes the conversation. The water jar still on the pavement. He points again. I bend. Kneel on one knee. Reach, pretend. Practice, again. This time closer to the pavement, almost touching the cement. I say, I don't know how. He points. I dip, draw, dip draw, dip and the brush remembers each of the six strokes. For the first time I don't think. Now there is no *one* or *two* or *three*. There is no *next*. I am my name. My name is me. Dip, stroke and when done, he says: *Good, Laoshi*. He asks if I know my name. I say I am An as in Xi'an, the students applaud. He shows us how my character has changed over time, four, maybe more, all recognizable.

*Your name with water  
he says always meaning you  
peace and safe return*

### CX Dillhunt

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