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Year: Senior

Majors: English, Biology

Fish and Basketball

*“Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick.”*

*— Susan Sontag*

*“Roger Chiang, who works in San Francisco, recalled a white woman glaring at him on the train to work, covering her nose and mouth. When he told her in a joking tone that he didn't have the coronavirus, she replied that she ‘wasn't racist — she just didn't want to get sick.’”*

*—from NPR’s “*[*When Xenophobia Spreads Like a Virus*](https://www.npr.org/2020/03/02/811363404/when-xenophobia-spreads-like-a-virus)*”*

My father loves fish and basketball

Fish and basketball

Fish, my father taught me to pick at fishbones

to reach around a waving fin.

Basketball, my father taught me to swish deflated basketballs

off the cloudy backboard of our driveway.

Fish, his southern Chinese childhood

Basketball, his American adopted adulthood

Fish, the market in Wuhan

Basketball, the NBA season cut short

“Unbelievable,” my father said.

He never thought that fish could cancel basketball.

On a subway train in San Francisco,

a woman turns away from an Asian man,

Says, “I’m not racist,”

Says, “I just don’t want to get sick.”

Her fingers, so delicate,

a net to catch her nose, her mouth.

Unbelievable.

My father is a doctor

He works night shifts

He tends to hearts

The thing that stopped

fish and basketball

followed my father home

pulled his voice into

the “night-side” of his throat.

His cough, metronomic,

dry as a mouthful of saltine crackers,

so severe that I could not call him

for more than five minutes.

To the lady on the train:

When a man becomes contagion

he will tell you the distance

between sickness and health.

Meaning, I cannot say that you are not already ill.

To the lady on the train:

If you find yourself in the “kingdom of the sick”

and you find my father tending to you,

or someone like him,

will you turn away?

Ask him about fish.

Ask him about basketball.