

Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 1999

Carol Clark Ottesen

Soft summer wind lifts girls' sheer dresses into wings,
Pinks, reds, and golds winking and rippling through the air
Like babies cooing far away.

They pose round-faced and porcelain
Against the vastness of the cement square
While cameras click, three of a family pose
As if the world were made of butterflies.

The Gate of Heavenly Peace, a fond mirage
Guarded by the rotund face of Mao so large
Even his wen is as big as a man's head.
Didn't he say a hundred flowers would bloom
Then smash them before the green broke through?

Like the hope of ten years back
When one sliver of light became a raging fire—
One hundred thousand waved the red and gold,
Chanted for a voice, heady with freedom,
Raised here a goddess thirty feet high
Of styrofoam and plaster, symbolizing liberty.

I saw her head fall, then the torch,
Felt the slashes pierce her side,
Heard tank chains clank across cement,
Guns crackling indiscriminate,
Cycle wheels askew and whirring,
Their rider's bloody glasses smashed and still
They roll on blind with power
Over all obstructions, even their own children.

I know a student, both legs crushed that night
Who in his wheelchair counts the ghosts,
Waters his pink and red geraniums.
But when he talks of wheeling up Mount Tai,
I look deep into the place where wings grow
And see something move and push toward the stars.

CAROL CLARK OTTESEN taught English at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and then at Brigham Young University. For two years she taught English in mainland China at Peking University and Shandong Medical University. She is the author of two books and has published several essays and poems.