

## **From a Basket to America**

*Lynette Baker*

*What would Confucius say to circumstance? It steers the wooden sampan down the mountain rivers, through the marsh because it knows no other way.*

You've slept inside the secrets Of a faceless name who could not keep you, Learned the language of abandonment Before you knew your own.

Side to side,  
Side to side, the ginger women rocked You in a basket woven, probably, By old hands hardened from a thousand lives Of sun-scarred work in flooded rice fields. Those lives before—what were you? Dragon Spirit? Brother of a kitchen god? Perhaps the four-winged moth inside an orange Paper lantern. Is that what you remembered In your basket crib? You cried for something, Anything you could not name, mainly Someone who would offer you a breast And then a place to rest—sustenance And safety in a bosom, a place to finger Flesh. You shared the skin, the thin-voiced words Because you knew no other way. Each day Inside the orphan playground room you shared Lullabies and side to side, side To side you swung inside a handmade bushel Cradle, ladled in your spoon-shaped sleep. Soft I murmur my American-Bred lullabies and stroke your licorice brow With pale fingers. *Mother? She's at work.* You pretend to only half believe That you are safe, here, in this painted bedroom; Safe beneath the tempered sunlight seeping in

Through curtain cracks, reaching for your heavy  
Eyelids, twitching leg. I can't say you've  
Forgotten all the bamboo dreams you had  
Across the ocean. I'm sure that in this  
mattress-Padded rest, what you see is  
something From another time and place: your  
face Burns mystery each time you wake up hot,  
Disoriented—questioning this western Light  
that marks out bath time, bedtime, Four-egg  
omelet breakfast, naptime. Perhaps, though, you  
know better than I do About the rising, setting  
sun. You made Your flight and I have just  
begun to scan The waters, wishing I knew how  
to swim And waiting for a breeze to steal my  
paper Dragon kite.

I sit, and kiss your feet  
With unversed lips and hug you to my recluse  
Chest because I know no other way  
To beckon in the world.