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Shanghai

Jannett Highfill

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JANETT HIGHFILL

Shanghai

Imagine we two found an apothecary shop in the alley behind the Temple on Nanjing Road,

a shop barely the size of a dragon’s head in a New Year’s parade so filled with resins, husks, and viscous distillations that even from the street a tourist chokes and gasps for breath

at the apothecary’s most transcendent compounds, a golden powder with aftertaste of almond that eases memory of pain and those crystals of seasalt and cobalt that uncloud remembered joy.

Imagine as we entered that cramped emporium the silence of the Temple clung to us and moved the apothecary to generosity: two packets apiece containing the blue and the gold.

Or would we strangers once home scatter these five thousand years to the winds

as if the Middle Kingdom had never existed?