All That Divides Us

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Published by Utah State University Press

Benedict, Elinor. 
All That Divides Us: Poems. 
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/9255.

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At the Temple of Heaven  
old men with tightened faces  
sell sticks of small red haw-apples, pierced  
by the dozen and glazed over fires. I buy them  
like beads with my newly-changed money, fumbling  
in cold, counting out coins and mixing  
white breath with incense  
of charcoal. My Chinese  
cousins watch as I bite  
the sweet skins, the tart fruit, full of seeds  
hard as mahogany, clinging to each other  
in carved families. Nini, the eldest,  
looks into my face as we climb  
the temple’s great stair and says in her soft  
syllables: Those were the favorite  
fruits of your aunt, our mother,  
when she was still  
with us. Do they grow in America  
where you live, where once she lived as a girl?  
Here, the same hawthorns bloom white in spring,  
and when their petals fade, the harsh yellow  
wind from the desert blows them  
over our rooftops like fine ashes that fly  
almost as far as the sea.