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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First we dine on carp, sweet and sour. After the prized fish, the old chairman slurps his soup. Hunched like a holy man, he never looks up from his bowl. But the Canadian exchange professor stares at me between spoonfuls and rubs his new beard. Over green cabbage and leeks he tells me his students of English beg him for lectures on Adam and Eve, Jesus and the fishes. He says these stories filled his childhood in Saskatchewan by the parsonage stove. Now they haunt his cold narrow room. And what does he tell them? Parables in whatever words he can find. Then the students ask if his people really believe. They write out dozens of questions on Bible-thin paper. Across the teacups choked with leaves, the professor hands me pages like white money, trembling.

During the passing of pears I study the students’ small writing. Who is God? Why did he make the world? What does it mean to be saved? I think these are the same questions asked by strangers who sweat in cold rooms. Before I can find out what answers he gave them, it’s time to rise from a table littered with fish bones and bow to a chairman sleepy with meat. I shake the professor’s hand and say
the only thing I can think of to join us together: Good luck fishing! His eyes look hungry for more.