

Marissa Hamilton

Steger

4th hour

Perched upon a light blue box on top of my dresser sits a rustic, wooden picture frame. It encapsulates a monochromatic blue painting with specks of coral throughout. Illustrated in the artwork is a tree, acorn-like in shape. Gradually, the color of the tree fades from a dark midnight blue to one that gets lost in the sky. Also in blue, floats a man in a simplistic canoe slowly drifting through the peaceful waters.

In 2012, I was gifted this masterpiece by my mom. That year my family and I travelled to China to learn more about my heritage. Walking through the streets of China was breathtaking, as in you do not want to inhale some of the scents from this third world country; they will literally take your breath away. We were at a flea market to try and take in the full Chinese experience, and foreign words filled my ears as I slowly travelled from vendor to vendor. We strolled aisle after aisle looking through the knick knacks that they deemed as ‘special’ and ‘one of a kind’. The dirt roads kicked up dust every time a car soared by, and it would cloud the path so that you could not see across the street. However, once the dust settled, all that was left was a blend of colors. Although it was very overwhelming, it had this alluring feeling that drew me in.

Then I saw it. Staring at me from across the street was my painting. Tugging on my mom’s arm, I pulled her towards the enchanting artwork and begged her to buy it for me. She stared at me quizzically and asked me if I really wanted it. “Yes mom, I *really* want it,” I replied wondering why she was questioning my decision. She smiled then turned to the man who was painting and asked him how much it was. He quietly answered, “139 RMB.” In her typical fashion, my mom began to bargain with the painter. She managed to negotiate a price of 100

RMB. What a bargain I thought, one hundred yuan is like fifteen dollars. My mom gave the man his money and he handed me the painting with a look that I will never forget. It was not hope, but the look he gave me was almost like relief. Relief that he did not have to negotiate with my mom anymore and that I was the one who wanted his painting, not some other child who couldn't fully appreciate it. I thanked him while I was smiling from ear to ear. My mom took my hand and we left to continue with our shopping spree.

To this day, that painting still has a home in my typical, westernized teenage room. It survived two moves and a lot of tears, but it still always makes its way to sit on top of my dresser. When people look at it, they always comment on how beautiful it is. However, no one truly knows its significance to me. No, there is not a deep meaning behind the shape of the tree, or the color of the sky. Its true meaning comes with the words my mom said to me when she placed it in my room. "Sweetie," she said, "I hope you love your painting because I do." I smiled, nodded and asked her why. "I don't love it because it's pretty," she replied, "but because it reminds me of your heritage. That painting should always remind you of where you come from."

Although the painting itself was not expensive, or necessarily well done, it will always have a special place in my heart. It will always bring me back to where my ancestors originated. It will always have a spot on top of my dresser.