

Chiune Sugihara: Paper Wings

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When I was young, my old soul weighed two tons.

Never a fawn, I came into the world a buck
with two crooked horns

and the heavy conscience of a knowing spirit.

As a youth, it sat on my shoulders so that I walked, always,
with my head down.

I watched the floors of my world go by without question

So the first time they came to me, they were no more than feet.

Feet are easy to ignore.

But when he fell into my path, it was the first time I could remember
meeting eyes

and his were like stones, weighted with worries,
onyx and steel.

The boy, with a fur cap crooked over an eggshell of an ear,
held out his hand. I grasped it, not knowing if it was I pulling him up
or him saving me. That child introduced a sea, parted before my office doors.

A thousand faces turned to the placard reading: Vice-Consul Sugihara
as flowers open up to the sun, with such fragility my heart weeped to know.

My colleagues stalked past, shoulders back, straining ahead.

Lungs burning with the need to scream, to beat my pain into their
minds, I cried but words, as ever, failed me.

I had tried not to see, but hiding from what is right doesn't make it wrong.

I granted visas indiscriminately, pretending for a time that my carelessness
was in calculation. I slaved night and day,
doling out a month's worth of rebellion
each afternoon and it was like ladling soup into empty bellies.

My signature seemed such a small thing,
but to them it was a blessing.

When the hungry capitol dogs grew ornery and bit off my free hand,
I threw their heavenly bone to the masses amid a flurry of papers bearing
that empty word: Chiune.

"I'm sorry." I bowed to them, the refuse, in shame, only to be told,
"We will surely meet again."

I am an old man now, sitting on the ledge of a never-ending fall.
That long black shadow, swinging on the pendulum's wings
beneath my feet, it frightens me. Yet, I have known fear.

It was in the lies, the tear tracks on a young woman's face as she knelt
and kissed the polish from my shoe.

Fear was in the "get up!"s and the "goodbyes," but it was
never mine.

My old soul has never felt so light.