

*Timothy Ong*

## SLEIGHT OF HAND

He waves his hand in front of the crowd  
and in a blink, a card gets caught in his grip,  
how smooth his execution, how quick  
from absence to presence, and absence again.  
He opens his fist, surrenders his naked hands  
to the audience. They pierce his palm  
with their gaze, crucify him with scrutiny.

He picks up a silver coin, tosses it thrice.  
In the silence of the room, suspense kills  
the impatient: the trick is fairly easy,  
yet sight betrays what is seen. A coin  
remains a coin until snapped in the middle.  
The magic becomes revelation.

The skeptic remains a skeptic,  
claims nothing to see here.  
He places his hand inside his pocket,  
feels his own face on the coin.

## TRAFFIC

I saw you once at a busy intersection when the traffic  
enforcer showed his open palm, and like Moses, the sea

of people parted to give way to cars. Between us,  
a catalog of the city: asphalt, buses, commotion, desire.

How I wished you would catch my gaze, too,  
interrupted only by the dizzying blur of speeding vehicles.

In this stillness, my feet, planted in concrete, grew  
uneasy. The rumble of the road, the beat erratic

yet familiar. This is how you know the city is alive:  
unseen syncopations, unheard repetitions. Beside you,

a child tugged at her mother's dress, elbowed the knees  
of a student in white. On your side of the road, a beggar stole

seconds, hopscotched his way to safety, asked me  
for loose change, his outstretched palm showed a head

in silver, received the ire of the impatient. In this stillness,  
the city is alive with transactions. A hand is a prayer, a step is

certainty, a gaze is an embrace. When the streetlight blinked  
green, time froze into a scene: as we walked towards

each other, like palms summoned to a prayer,  
you raised your head and darted a glance.

The city collapsed into the size of your eyes.