

Tradition is a Willow  
by Annabelle Zhao

tradition is a willow  
her branches cascading  
not quite trapping  
not quite embracing  
hard to escape

a solitary sanctuary  
until  
one realized  
she isn't

imagine  
those African Americans  
in the fields  
laboring, working, toiling  
in the heat

because  
the whites wanted slaves  
out of greed  
unaware that by enslaving others, they were only  
enslaving themselves in their cruelty

picture  
those Afghan girls  
desperate to  
read, write, grow  
but barred

because  
of their gender  
something they were born with  
a choice that was not  
their own

yet that was  
tradition  
people were  
scared, nervous, skittish  
about change

like jumping  
off the 5-meter board  
when you've been  
practicing on the  
3-meter board

but it's not  
always  
dangerous  
leaping,  
    bounding,  
        jumping,  
and  
falling,  
    falling,  
        falling,

into new beginnings  
as  
change  
restarts the  
cycle

because  
falling  
isn't always  
bad, chancy, scary  
it's different

and  
the willow of tradition  
is not always  
good, moral, ethical  
but it can be

like  
sometimes,  
when we just  
want to  
cozy up and stay put

seeing  
that big family  
gathered around the table  
laughing, talking, eating  
celebrating the Lunar New Year

because  
they wanted a  
good time  
a great start  
to the year

glancing at  
the council members  
working out problems by  
discussing, analyzing, thinking  
instead of fighting

because  
they wanted a  
peaceful  
society  
free of war

and the tradition willow  
loves us  
but also cages us  
and we should use our brains  
for what they were meant to do

we must not  
be locked by tradition  
yet  
we should also  
keep it

all for hopes of a better world