

ELIZABETH LINDSEY ROGERS

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Beijing, 2007

热 meant *hot*, summer's
tin sky, city grid
closed in, a mesh,

hemmed. Only that
one street had the green
relief of trees, and a few

popsicle chests: flavored
mung bean, hawthorn,
corn. Even jokes on a stick

I couldn't write or read.
Why are the neighbors'
parrots hung in cages

along the road? I would
have asked Teacher Hé
had I had the right

verbs. Instead I cupped
one hand in the shape
of a hemp room, and

with the other pointed:
bird, them, why.
Because they too need air

she said, *whoosh*
to make meaning clear;
to catch a breeze

men played blackjack
with their shirts half-
lifted. Parrots rocked,

almost reticent
except the occasional
易易: *yì yì* from the trees.

Almost *yī*, which
means *one*. At first
I resisted the pen

as her hand gripped
mine, covered its rock
like paper. We etched

my new surname,
spun its fine
black thread:

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luó: lifted net, a gauze
for catching birds.