

GROUP #4 POEMS

Cathy Song *Lost Sister*

In China
even the peasants
named their first daughters
Jade -
the stone that in the far fields
could moisten the dry season,
could make the men move mountains
for the healing green of the inner hills
glistening like slices of winter melon.

And the daughters were grateful:
they never left home.
To move freely was a luxury
stolen from the at birth.
Instead they gathered patience,
learning to walk in shoes
the size of teacups,
without breaking -
the arc of their movements
as dormant as the rooted willow,
as redundant as the farmyard hens.
But they traveled far
in surviving,
learning to stretch the family rice,
to quiet the demons,
the noisy stomachs.

There is a sister
across the ocean,
who relinquished her name,
diluting jade green
with the blue of the Pacific.
Rising with a tide of locusts,
she swarmed with others
to inundate another shore.
In America,
there are many roads
and women can stride along with men.

But in another wilderness,
the possibilities,
the loneliness,
can strangulate like jungle vines.
The meager provisions and sentiments
of once belonging -
fermented roots, Mah-Jongg tiles and
firecrackers -
set but a flimsy household
in a forest of nightless cities.
A giant snake rattles above,
spewing black clouds into your kitchen.
Dough-faced landlords
slip in and out of your keyholes,
making claims you don't understand,
tapping into your communication
systems
of laundry lines and restaurant chains

You find you need China:
your one fragile identification,
a jade link
handcuffed to your wrist.
You remember your mother
who walked for centuries,
footless -
and like her,
you have left no footprints,
but only because
there is an ocean in between,
the unremitting space of your
rebellion.

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Rose Furuya Hawkins

Niesi Daughter: The Second Generation

When people ask
about my mother
I look away and say,
"Oh, she's been gone
A long time now.
I hardly knew her
Anyway."

But I know she was
A renegade. Why else
Was she standing on some foreign shore,
Uncomfortable in high-heeled shoes
And black dress with bust darts,
Her cherry-blossom kimono
Left far behind?

How else did she consent
To trade her rice-paper walls
For corrugated tin
And to love, honor, and obey
This crude stranger, *Ito-San*,
Who sipped Coca-Cola
Through a straw?

Yes, my mother was a renegade.
She braved the future
By swallowing her pride,
Her delicate fingers
Shaping paper swans
After a long day
Of picking cotton
In the Imperial Valley.

She sewed dresses
For my doll
Long after her feet
Were too tired to work the treadle
Of her prized Singer.
She taught me the words:
Mi-mi, ba-na, ku-chi,
Pointing to my ear,
My nose, my mouth.
She fed me full
Of fat rice balls
And pickled radishes,
Afraid I might ask
For bologna sandwiches.

Mama, forgive me.
I guess I knew you well.
I was your miracle child,
Your second generation
Nisei daughter,
Born to you
When you were already too old,
Already too torn
By barbed-wire fences
And mixed loyalty.

Oh, where have you gone
Little moon-faced child,
Who once chased fireflies
For paper lanterns
In old Japan?

GROUP #4 POEMS

Nikki Giovanni **Woman**

she wanted to be a blade
of grass amid the fields
but he wouldn't agree
to be the dandelion

she wanted to be a robin singing
through the leaves
but he refused to be
her tree

she spun herself into a web
and looking for a place to rest
turned to him
but he stood straight
declining to be her corner

she tried to be a book
but he wouldn't read

she turned herself into a bulb
but he wouldn't let her grow

she decided to become
a woman
and though he still refused
to be a man
she decided it was all
right

GROUP #4 POEMS

Langston Hughes **Afro-American Fragment**

So long,
So far away
Is Africa
Not even memories alive
Save those that history books create,
Save those that songs
Beat back into the blood -
Beat out of blood with words sad-sung
In strange un-Negro tongue -
So long,
So far away
Is Africa.

Subdued and time-lost
Are the drums - and yet
Through some vast mist of race
There comes this song
I do not understand,
This song of atavistic land,
Of bitter yearnings lost
Without a place -
So long,
So far away
Is Africa's
Dark face.

GROUP #4 POEMS

Naomi Shihab Nye *Remembered*

He wanted to be remembered, so he gave people
things

they would remember him by. A large trunk,
handmade of
ash and cedar. A tool box with initials shaped of
scraps.

A tea kettle that would sing every morning,
antique glass jars to fill with crackers, noodles,
beans.

A whole family of jams he made himself from the
figs and berries
that purpled his land.

He gave these things unexpectedly. You went to
see him
and came home loaded. You said "Thank you" till
your lips

grew heavy with gratitude and swelled shut.
Walking with him across the acres of piney forest,
you noticed the way he talked to everything, a
puddle, a stump,
the same way he talked to you.

"I declare you do look purty sittin' there in that
field
reflectin' the light like some kind of mirror, you
know what?"

As if objects could listen.

As if earth had a memory too.

At night we propped our feet by the fireplace
and laughed and showed photographs and the fire remembered
all the crackling music it knew. The night remembered
how to be dark and the forest remembered how to be mysterious
and in bed, the quilts remembered how to tuck up under our chins.
Sleeping in that house was like falling down a deep well,
rocking in a bucket all night long.

In the mornings we'd stagger away from an unforgettable breakfast
of biscuits - he'd lead us into the next room
ready to show us something or curl another story into our ear.
He scrawled the episodes out in elaborate longhand
and gave them to a farmer's wife to type.

Stories about a little boy and a grandfather,
chickens and prayer tents, butter beans and lightning.
He was the little boy.

Some days his brain could travel backwards easier than it could
sit in a chair, right there.

When we'd left, he'd say "Don't forget me! You won't forget me now,
will you?" as if our remembering could lengthen his life.

I wanted to assure him, there will always be a cabin in our blood
only you live in. But the need for remembrance silenced me,
a ringing rising up out of the soil's centuries, the ones
who plowed this land, whose names we do not know.