

Cartography of Family

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Acknowledgments

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When I First Saw Daddy
Like the Dandelion Seeds
He Loved the Gardens

PoetryMagazine.com

Lemon
Gravity

When I First Saw Daddy

When I first saw daddy,
he was like an Egyptian cat;
skinny, foraging, and stern,
just released from a Vietcong prison.
He told us he hated the color red.
Sixteen years later,
he wears a red sweatshirt and smiles.
The pin tip opening in his heart enough
to let in a dribble of red.

Grandma

Your hands glow of white jade,
Green flow of river veins,
Rice bowl in hands shaking,
Journey to the table,
On Chinese New Year red-dyed
watermelon seeds
cracked between false teeth leak
scent and red into hands
where decades ago my
tiny fingers reposed.

He Loved the Gardens

He loved the brown belly
of dry leaves of a palm,
so crisp and frail and ancient.
I went with him
once to a Buddhist temple
where he took pictures of
oriental plants,
the kind with tiny flowers
balancing on
stems slender like
anorexic girls.

Lemon

Soothing yellow acidic pleasure
snaps off at the downward
pull of a metal picker.
Abundant freshness
Topples
In a solitary *thump*!
I reach downwards
for the sun-colored conundrum,
placing it carefully on top
of the other lemons,
cradled in my arms,
that await to ultimately
become somebody's pie.

Like the Dandelion Seeds

Like the dandelion seeds that
travel on the shoulders of a breeze,
your body not yet ready for
the mechanics of transportation.
I'm your only means of getting
from the living room to the kitchen.

Journey

He attempts to go back, my son,
to be loved unconditionally
and to hear the continual thumping of a heartbeat.
That drumbeat beneath the melody of blood
rushing through arteries and the sounds of
muffled, but familiar voices coming from
some unknown world. The rain shushes like
the rush of amniotic fluid in the ear when he
could hear through water. So content to suck
on a finger, to wiggle and roll, weightless, being
rocked as I walked. He wraps himself in blankets,
curls up as if in a sac pressed against my inner belly.
And through the thin wall was a white light that
made me glow. How like a moth he rushes
into lamps. *Each time, as if returning home, finally.*

Gravity

1.

Tenderness that is transparent
Like this glass - vibrations, ringing.
The gravity of Trees pull us into their Temples.
Pages of images swirl, a flower emerges and
consumes us in its triumphant beauty.
The weight of the Encyclopedia of Flora
on your lap,
persevering in our delight.
Next, some Chinese numbers - yut, yee, sam...
Sounds of continents, consonants,
and vowels spin in constellations.
Laughter billows.

2.

We step into the floating darkness to see your sunflowers,
hidden behind a curtain of bushes - three stalks of exquisiteness,
pregnant with gold. An interval in integral time, vertical,
in the center of the night. Beyond, in the contours of shadows,
I almost stepped on the small purple flowers near the ground,
exposed in its shining velvet - celestial.
In dim light, we looked at radishes with anticipation.
The fresh fragrance of mint leaves complement the night.

3.

Sipping time in abundance, in spheres of inmost
transformations, mingling with wind.
Above - a lighted window.
At this intersect of convergence,
a dawn in the tendril of darkness -
all that is intangible penetrates
completely.

Moon Festival

In the middle of the moon cakes are egg yolks
around a red bean paste where centuries ago notes were hidden
by the Chinese to pass along rebellion war plans
to overthrow the Mongols. My parents buy these cakes for us to
eat every year – it is a tradition.

Genghis Khan and his descendants ruled the vast lands of China.
The Mongolians did not eat moon cakes.
I taste the night sky under which the rebels gathered.
How they organized in the dark and the salted moon crumbles on my tongue.
For now, I will be a quiet, obedient Chinese-American daughter
with my head down when spoken to, but I silently plan my own rebellions.

The Bomb Shelter

When bombs are exploding outside,
It means that there are implosions.

Vibrations travel through air and liquid.

It was as if my amniotic fluid was
imprinted with airplanes dropping
bombs and screams and fire.

In the bomb shelter in Saigon,
my father was teaching my two-year-old
brother French. "Je m'appelle Chuc Nai Dat."

"Je m'appelle...."

I was in the shelter of blood and fluid,
in a sac fed by umbilical cord from placenta to belly.
My heart beats like a machine gun.

Not Worth a Bullet

A bullet is made of
copper or lead.
Gunpowder is
poured into the case.
The firing pin hits the
primer at the back of
the bullet which starts
the explosion. Altogether,
the bullet and the case are
typically about 2 inches in length
and weigh a few ounces.

My father said that
the Vietcongs
told him and the other
prisoners while in
“re-education” camp
that they were not worth a bullet.
They would work for the Vietcongs
and then die.

A bamboo tree is smooth, long
with roots that hold the earth
with the strong grip of green
knuckles and fingers.
They are used to build houses,
fences, etc.
A bamboo tree can weigh 60 pounds
or more and be 20 feet tall.

The prisoners were forced to
walk barefoot up the mountains
and carry bamboo back to the camp.

Due to the weight of the bamboo,
they were only able to carry one
at a time.



Teresa Chuc Dowell immigrated to the U.S. under political asylum with her mother and brother shortly after the Vietnam War. She teaches English literature and writing at a public high school in Los Angeles. Her poetry appear in journals such as the *National Poetry Review*, *Verse Daily*, and *miller's pond* (online) and her creative nonfiction appear in journals such as *Memoir Journal*, *Sugar Mule*, and *Mosaic*. Teresa earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and is currently a candidate for an MFA in Creative Writing (poetry) at Goddard College in Vermont.

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