



pact's

point of view

The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

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Never by Ellwyn Kauffman

I never asked to be born to those who wouldn't have me
I never asked to be left in Sajik Park for fate
I never asked to become the son of a white couple.
None of this was mine to ask.
I never had a chance to learn your language
or your customs
wear the Hanbok,
pour and receive properly.
Rice was rarely eaten in my home
I grew up on bedtime stories and powdered milk,
hot dogs and Mother Goose,
chewable vitamins and violin lessons.

I never asked to be stared at
called a good and a chink.
taught never to fight back
have the courage not to hear.
Courage or cowardice?
I swallowed my bile
choked as it went down
just words
from people who knew better
but spit them at me anyway.
God loves you and them
everyone.
Nothing else matters.
Burn in Hell, I still thought.

I never knew why I cried when my parents
were gone for too long
never trusted myself
always mimicked, copied, plagiarized,
nice to a fault, willing to sacrifice too much
tried to be all things to everyone.
They must accept me
dutiful son, foreign-faced kid
endear, curry favor, follow
be, do, talk like them
plow their fertile lives
instead of the one I was handed
become a futile, ardent shadow.

An ache, a yearning emptiness
in the pit of me
Korea should be there
the food, the language, the legacy.
I miss this now
Most of all
I miss my own past.

I never knew who gave birth to me,
which streets or shores, hills or flats
I came from
cousins, aunts, uncles
if my birth family is still there
I am an odd mark
a dark footnote.
If those who brought me into life
want nothing to do with me
I will accept it
only after I know this—
why I was left in a park
on the Fourth of July
as sure as the sun
I have a right to know
of that independence day.

I never want to hear that my past should be left alone
that what I'm searching for are ghosts.
Would I be here if my past wasn't real?
Don't think I don't belong here in Korea
Korea is mine as it is yours
I may not know how to speak to you
I may not know anything of this place
but tell me not to worry
tell me I'm a fool to want to find anything
tell me you know what I've been through
and I will ball my words up in a fist
shouting in your face—
you will never know me
you will never understand
you will never know my life

Tell me to go away
tell me my problems are too deep to be touched
and I will reach down and find
my years of pretending to be deaf
the horrible results of good intentions
fueled with ignorance.
I will show you anger
my rage with no place to go
all in a seething torrent
if you dismiss me
if you exclude me
if you tell me what it is to be Korean
and leave me no room.

*Ellwyn Kauffman graduated from UCLA film school in 2004 and is currently working on film and photo projects in Los Angeles. This poem originally appeared in *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees* (Pandal Press, 1997), available for purchase through Pact.*