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To Be Loved Is Not the Same as Loving

Joyce Shi
Pittsford Mendon High School

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To Be Loved Is Not the Same as Loving
Joyce Shi
11th Grade, Pittsford Mendon H.S.

To Be Loved Is Not the Same as Loving

i ask my mother for a love i have never felt
at the hands of the nation that birthed me,
shaped me in the mold of all of its children
until my rigid bones and almond eyes
grew too strong and too wide.

she cradles me in her arms,
hugging tendrils of ivy around the statue of my body,
and tells me that

in china there is a myth of creation
in which a man tears yin and yang apart
to form the earth from the pieces of cosmic balance
he holds in his hands.

he smears one into sky
and crumbles the other into ground,
carving figurines from the clay of stardust.

she tells me about my ancestors,
formed in the palm of creation,
eyes and bodies shaped by the fingers of the heavens
to be the color of burnt amber and honey.

she tells me to take the wasted sorrow in my mouth
and let it unfurl into a reflection of this nation
captized by the pride of my celestial history.

i erode in the net of her words
and sculpt myself into the bristles of her sweater,
searching for the cosmos in the salt of my tears.

she tells me this country did not love her either
when she stepped out of the clouds and onto
bubblegum-stained, cigarette-littered pavement,

but she loved it with all the vacancy left in her heart
from the concavities she emptied over the ocean,
filling an archive across the pacific.

she tells me this nation loves us in a different way
and i call her a liar.

mother tells me to watch my words
and i mistake my tongue for a switchblade—

let me be a knife
sharp enough to carve a home,
or at the very least a place
that belongs to me.