First Place
Things to ask a grandmother
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Things to ask a grandmother

how are you / do you like it over there / what do i / do the nosebleed

won't / stop will you / make dinner boil rice how / did you tell the water / level

when you dove headfirst / was it / three knuckles deep /

you weren't a swimmer were you / afraid of drowning / or are the tides warmer / on

the distant shores / can we sing *jyut ji waan waan ziu gau zau* where / were the daughters wives

mothers / and daughters again washed ashore / are they with you / now did you pick

your calluses too / were they too / pruned to hold shape what was it / like to cradle

water / in one arm and my mother / in another you were once

a daughter / too right / can you tell me about / grandpa / and / summers in

China / and / sweet rice cakes / and / the color red how

many times were you shot in the thigh will i / turn into water if i cry too / much / will i

liquify why / are there waves in your hair when

you couldn't speak / gwei wa to the gwei lo did your voice sound / like gargling can i /

see the secrets you hide in the mooncake tin did you hide / your family there too when

the Japanese came blazing with guns how / did / you learn to forget when

the doctors drained your body of / fluids was it scary or did it feel / like

rebirth / how are you / always so warm do i look the same is goodbye a promise / for

a tender hurt will i get / to say mine please how / are / you there is no past / in

the Cantonese tongue so let me ask again / how are you

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Second Place
War Cry into the Wall Between Us
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W A R C R Y

into the Wall Between Us

Daughter

She brought lilies,
her favourite,
just fragile things trembling
beside the bruised machinery,
stepping into the soft shadow
of my hospital cell.

She paused
gathering her courage
before her words came:
not the rage,
nor the aspirated consonants
that armoured every fight,
but clumsy, slippery syllables
that I once prayed for at bedtime,
midnight sobbing into
pillows pressed to my mouth.

She knelt beside me,
kneecaps raw on hospital linoleum,
begging for forgiveness
with the lilies in her hand,
only after all other prayers had failed,
and her head bowed,
but my heart would not,
because even then,
the blue of her hands
lingered on me.

Mother

I knelt with lilies.

In our home,
the walls bore witness to battles we never won,
a battlefield where she bled
and I, empty-handed,
once allies against the world,
now standing on opposite sides,
each of us clutching our weapon.

I left behind
the narrow alleys of Taipei, Room 508,
my parents' stove still warm with breakfast,
left them, left language, left my softer name,
only to find that they hated my words here,
strangers recoiling from my voice in the market,
where my tones were wrong,
no friends meeting me for tea,
no lullabies, only commercials
in a tongue foreign and sharp.
I didn't know how to raise a daughter
in a world where I was always an outsider,
how to teach you to love yourself
when I had forgotten how.

I had no one to call
when you refused to eat, when you misbehaved.

Only then did I see
my daughter could not cradle those lilies,
fragile blooms caught in a straitjacket of crossed arms.
So I laid them gently on the icy table
hovering over her bed.

Nights, I waited for you to become soft,
a woman who would tuck me in,
not tuck me away.

She waited for me behind the curtains
with a cloth hanger in her hand,
and the clock heaved with worry.

LILLIES

At sixteen, I ran.
I carried silence
as my suitcase
stuffed with every word
I was never supposed to say.

I crashed on borrowed mattresses,
in rooms where mother was a myth
and kindness a currency
I could barely afford,
thinking myself safer in cold beds
than burning in her pyre.

I ground myself into fragments,
learning the way city lights
disguise emptiness,
moulding myself like clay,
only to break the mould again.

But grit made a shelter.
Slowly, I stitched a life
to Sir Run Run Shaw Hall at CUHK,
where nobody knew how I got there,
only that I changed.

Ma, look—
I finally embarked on that new continent
rising from our wreckage,
free of war, of what we were,
I charted its wild beauty,
spoke its language.
I heard my voice
and came alive with song and joy
I fought so long to find.

Days, I wished I knew the right things to do and say,
but I was cast into open water
without knowing how to swim.

Some nights, I feared my flame would go out,
and, perhaps, yours with it.
How I failed to freeze the ticking clock.

LILLIES

I sat in a darkened auditorium,
watching you, my daughter.

My parents, your grandparents,
were dust in the wind of Taipei's past,
never knowing the woman you became,
the woman I became in their absence.
I carried their hopes and blood
into a world that demanded more than I had.

I choked on their absence.
All these young people shifting in their seats,
but you: my daughter who clawed her way here
with hands I never offered to hold.

Your name called.
I'd spent my life swallowing it,
now the world spat it back, polished.

What am I supposed to feel?
Guilt, for the crushing weight on a little girl.
Relief, for the woman you became,
that you made it out, made it whole,
despite me, perhaps because of me.
Joy, so fierce it hurt,
mingled with the living truth

that my parents never saw this,
never saw their granddaughter rise.

I stayed seated as others rose.
My hands, empty for decades,
clutched the programme
where your name outshined
every word I broke you with.
I whispered into no one's ear:
"See how she glows"

Third Place
ode to asian koel
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ode to asian koel

a chorus of wool
you stand in a pool
with cold strands

of tulle, choreographed
like an ampoule condensed
with a single pull, or like

夫婦 coming to the blue
flying as kites on a spool
caught in a crescendo

then crashing through as
a pair of jewels in full bloom
but scattered
too

cool breeze curls the moon
as you coddle the couple
composing two concertos

*夫婦 [fu1 fu5]: husband and wife