

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/4

Raziya Wang

What I didn't take with me to NYU

Three-toed monster tracks after a blizzard,
macramé bracelets and Miss Mary Mack.
Fortune teller origami, yellow school buses,
and letting my mother choose my clothes.
Playing tag at twilight under the great oak,
bubble dreams under the stairs,
and the exhilarating clutch
of sneaking strawberry ice cream
out of the bucket at midnight.
A first crush on a boy with crooked teeth,
a sweaty eight-minute slow dance
to Stairway to Heaven,
acne, braces, and bad taste
in heavy metal bands.
Fearsome Laura Ashley skirts
that met the draconian dress code,
a headmaster who wore bowties
and studied extinct languages,
saltbox houses with their lonely eyes,
Saturday school and 10 pm curfew.
A heaped 80's fringe when I had wanted
90's Jennifer Aniston layers
just in time for high school graduation.
The welcome emptiness of that last summer
its shadows stretched long and taut
by the fingers of a white-hot sun,
a lingering kiss, wet and salty,
my hair filled with crumbs of sand,
and finally, the plastic husk of childhood
shed.

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Dad

Folded bones beneath
a blanket in island summer
while your grandkids run in their swimsuits
alive and wet from the pool,

captive to your liquid lunch
meandering twenty-seven inches
of clear plastic tubing
while the pump clicks like a closing door,

you sit still, a papier mâché
version of yourself
with Sharpie eye dots
and watercolor lips.

How's it going Dad?

I stand with my sunhat in my hands
and wait several beats.

Isn't the weather nice?

I thought we had more time,
that your sickness would make you see
me, that you would say you were sorry
you missed so much of my childhood.

But, my words float in the gulf between us
pastel, sun-bleached versions of themselves,
and your words float in a cobweb
long abandoned by its spider.

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I stand there a long time
without sitting down
next to you who are not you
anymore.

From the living room onto the patio
Bach's Sonata in G Major wafts.
I remember how you used to listen
to Yo-Yo Ma for hours with your eyes closed.

We listen together and then
your open lips release
a cello string of spittle
and I smile
right back at you
I smile.