

On the Topic of Roots:

As sweat builds at the base of my bra, I survey the bones of my 10x10 room, the Santa Barbara heat beginning to bite. Summer has come unexpectedly early and the house built in the 70s begins to swell. The wooden doors jammed and floorboards cracked, a home I must transport four-years into cardboard boxes.

Reaching for the packing tape at the corner of my desk, I glance at the plant I purchased at the start of college. Striated and proud, a taut little thing; I dragged my mom to a nursery explaining that I needed to ground myself. Four years in the making: tender care, summers of plant-sitters, and winters of re-potting, I stare at its green foliage. What was once was two petals, a humble arrangement of 6, some bitten and mishapen, some waxed and sturdy—once insignificant, now a breathing life I whisper to,

“What a strong plant you are.”

Its roots coiling deep, simplicity standing like bedrock beneath the world. Small and silent, I study its composition, its every fiber. From growth and regeneration, dried leaflets make way to new bulbs, tiny veins running east to west... I stop myself. Surveying my empty room, a fractal of absence, each corner echoing the last, my focus returns once more to the plant. I begin to question the permanence of roots. Pillars of becoming, I have never given them much thought. But perhaps roots are more fundamental than people think, like dirt packed hollows, or fisted hands racking at something ancient.

How God told Adam, "from dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return." Perhaps roots are organic, perhaps they are biology itself: inheritance, birth rights and declarations, *like I belong to you, and you to I*, though the operative word belonging—maybe roots are ancestral—something I was never taught to read.

And on the topic of roots, what do they mean? What do they matter when it's a place you can't remember: can't touch, feel, or smell? When it is a place you've only read about—small, unimportant, invisible on most maps—what rights can one claim from a province in central China, an amalgamation of tongue tied words and inflections. A language learned, a language lost.

In every sense of the word, uprooting is something unbidden, unthinking, yet mourned—like worn tissue cut raw. Clinging to the stories of who you were as a child though they don't begin at birth. A cascade of identity, disrupted and confused, then a sudden ache catching fire in what could have been, traditions never practiced—I am a recursive omission. Echoes of a child who cried for home, reaching out, grasping for familiarity on the streets of Asia—a woman characteristically similar—black hair, folded eyes, and a flat nose...

On the topic of roots—ripped up roots are guttural. Ripped up roots is the word *adopted* sealed above your head and a \$30,000 government bond attached to your name. Ripped up roots are abandonment, like a punch to the stomach, or like the last kid to be picked at recess. It feels like stares at carpool when both your parents are white, or the fear when role call comes around—

Fear that en-jambéd between America and America is a Chinese face.