
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Joan Kwon Glass: Three Poems

Joan Kwon Glass · Monday, June 6th, 2022

Cartouche

When you died,
mom insisted we remove
every photo from the walls.
Not just the ones with you in them,
but also of me and my children.

And your children.

Next, she invited friends
to take your belongings:
a new set of dishes, your perfume,
a book you inscribed in high school,
the little “a” at the end of “Julia,”
tender and intact.

Ancient Egyptians believed
that to cross over into the Land of Two Fields,
your heart must be light as a feather,
and your name cast onto stone,
for this means you are loved.
I practice writing your name,
leaving it anywhere
that feels permanent.
I press your handwriting
into papyrus wings.

Mom motions toward me
with outstretched hands,
offering up a handful of your jewelry
as if to say, take these
before they break
or are stolen from us.
Hold them in your hands.
Pretend that something,

anything
 other than her absence
 can endure.

*

Questions For My Mother

I want to ask

when he questioned you about heaven
 why did you choose angels?
 you could have pointed
 to the tulips opening

why didn't you call for help
 as soon as you heard the gunshot?
 I mean how can a gunshot in the next room
 sound like anything other than a gunshot?

what if we'd written his obituary to say
 who he might have been
 and instead of naming his survivors
 listed those who failed him?

how can you still spend every Sunday
 reading those stories about men
 who give up their firstborn
 to prove their love for God?

Instead I ask

why do you keep buying orange juice
 for my children when it has so much sugar?
 their adult teeth have grown in already
 they still have their whole lives
 ahead of them.

*

Chuseok ??

Today my uncle and his wife will visit
 my grandparents' tomb in Korea
 the way they do every year.
 They will leave trays stacked high
 with persimmons and powdered tteok
 then say a Christian prayer as the wind
 stirs everything into wakefulness.
 On ?? we remember the rise of the Silla,
 kingdom of gold crowns with jade
 carved and dangling like grapes.

We celebrate three centuries of unity,
North and South, dead and living together.
We salute the rising moon.
I think of my nephew's grave in Troy, Michigan,
7,400 miles from my grandparents' tomb,
his headstone flush to the ground.
Every time it rains the water floats trash
down from the street nearby:
a cigarette box, crumpled Burger King cups,
plastic bags torn like the skin of ravaged prey.
If I could go back I would claim a summit
and build him a tomb.
I would set a Silla crown upon his head.
Every year, I'd bring gifts and invite the wind
into the tomb where his skeletal jaws
hang wide open forever
trying to say one last thing.

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[Purchase HOW TO MAKE PANCAKES FOR A DEAD BOY by Joan Kwon Glass](#)

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