

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Tanya Ko-Hong: “Look Back”

Tanya Ko-Hong · Wednesday, June 3rd, 2015

Tanya Ko-Hong (Tanya Hyonhye Ko) received her MFA from Antioch University Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *Rattle*, *Writers at Work*, and the *Paris Press Blog*. She is the author of the poetry collection *Generation One Point Five*. Her next book, *Comfort Woman*, a collection of poems in Korean, will be published in summer 2015 by Purunsasang.

Look Back

I. *Oma, how did you come to America?*

My 10th grade daughter asked.

The textbook answer or the truth?

For better education, better opportunities and better life, I say.

Oma, it's so boring. All Asians in my class have the same answers.

Yes, we want to run away from the truth.

We want to not remember.

We want to protect— not to cause problems.

We learn to pretend—

Delete names.

Disconnect.

I didn't want to look back.

My mother's open eyes—

in her closed casket.

I travel to the back of my mind,

all the way to Korea.

II. Paper Divorce

Rumor of war,

when the Korean President,

Park Chung Hee got shot.

Mother wanted us to go
to America,
the strongest, happiest and richest place.

But how to get us there?

No tickets.

No relative married to an American.

Paper divorce was my parents' decision.

Of course,

they didn't ask

our permission.

Best shot for their children:

new paper mom in the States.

It happened secretly—

. Of course

it was illegal.

To survive, I learned to pretend not to know.

III. Interview with an Immigration Officer

Only the children, had to be interviewed.

My father worried

we wouldn't pass.

My sister and brothers sat in silence

protect my family,

I did my duty to perform.

Where is your mother?

(My mother made breakfast this morning, but it is not on the script.

I put on a sad face...)

We didn't see our mom about two years. We lost contact with her.

We hope to see her before we go to America.

I learned how to lie with innocent face—

how to let my tears fall

as I gazed at his hands.

Where are you going to live?

We will go to Hawaii and will live with our father and a new mother.

(Is this how I learned to live in illusion?)

He is writing on a yellow pad.

What about your youngest sister?

(Do I have a younger sister? Oh, my father's love child.)

Why isn't she going with you?

(I hate her at that moment; she is always a stumbling block.)

She is too young to go—she lives with our mother.

(Another lie.)

What do you want to do in America?

We will study hard and become a good person—

He stamped the paper.

Have a great life in America.

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