

Dyads

An Tarbh

From Monivea we drove to the cottage. My aunt said “You’re very welcome,” and yet the thick quiet of the family drew the walls and roof in so close around me I couldn’t speak. The old man sat still in his chair—his eyes barely moved. I stood against the cushions of a stiff red couch and with a hand on my mother looked around the room. My aunt gave me rhubarb and sugar pie. It was too sweet. As she talked I felt her sorrow and anger as surely as if she’d put a scarf around my neck.

Outside we visited with the bull. “Go on now, he won’t hurt you,” they told me. I walked to the wooden rail. The thing stood as my uncle had sat—the round, black eye stared back at me as his had. Below and away, I could hear the ocean as it quietly washed the foot of the hard, skirting cliff. Nothing budged. I watched him standing there in his field and saw the hard line of his jaw, the low horn, the hoof in shadow. It was a wet night.

California

Stretched across the dark water the lights of small boats, anchored alone or tethered to moorings, shine as reflected constellations: Andromeda, Lyra, the Pleiades. They are as cells of iridescent protozoa, an organic extension of the city. The unfirm depths of the Pacific have tugged at their broken colony. The Californians have released themselves onto the ocean and cast the boundary line out over the face of the water like a fisherman’s net. As our plane turns to the shore to descend, Los Angeles emerges as a brilliant crescent.

We have sangria in the shade of a palm tree. The breeze lifts the leaves and light falls on her face. She smiles behind tortoise-shell sunglasses. *Right now you're my entire world.* We rise and her apple-green skirt flashes in the sun like the scales of a fish leaping from water. It’s hot. Glass clinks as she clears our table and the small chain on her neck sparkles silver-white. Inside she collects her tips and then secretly refills the sorority girls’ drinks. She laughs at their flirtatious insinuation as I hold the door open to Santa Monica Boulevard.

Cocoa, Rice Pudding, and the China Doll

I'd read in a corner of the bookstore for an hour when my mother told me she was going home, and that I could walk back on my own when I was ready. So I stayed, but without her there I grew anxious, and left not long after she did. Outdoors it was snowing. I walked the wrong way for half an hour before I turned around, so in another hour I was home. I was very cold, so she made me a cup of cocoa.

At Brookhouse School, after prayer, we ate in the dining room of the old house and sat at long, wooden tables with our class. None of the others liked rice pudding, and when they found out I did they thought I was mad. But I got four. My brother confessed years later that a girl had brought a china doll, a gift from her parents, to show her class. He'd stolen it during lunch, taken it into the woods with another boy and buried it.

Okonomiyaki

Inside the museum I learned that on August 6, 1945, at 8:15 a.m., the bomb killed 200,000, including 10,000 Korean prisoners. I looked at before-and-after pictures of the port city, saw twisted bicycles and charred shoes, and medical photographs of radiation burns. I was more comfortable outside, despite the rain. The Peace Park contains a number of monuments: the Peace Flame, Sadako's paper cranes, the Atomic Bomb Dome. At the entrance is the Memorial Cenotaph, a curved, stone roof that represents the A-frame houses which were here before the war. Beneath is a simple chest, carved of the same stone, into which the names of the dead were placed. An inscription, translated into English, reads "Rest in peace, for the error shall not be repeated."

I walked to one of the last stalls on the fourth floor and ordered okonomiyaki with shrimp, and a draft beer. She poured crêpe batter onto the grill and wound it into a thin circle. Onto this she mixed cabbage and soba noodles, and then cracked an egg and stirred. The noodles became wet and glossy. Steam rose. I sipped the beer. She then added the shrimp and a thick, black sauce. She flipped the meal and pushed it toward me. As I'd been leaving the park, a Japanese boy had turned from his group to greet me. He'd bowed and said in unaccented English, "How do you do?" "How do you do?" I'd repeated.

Oculus

Before the Cortland Street station was destroyed in the bombing, it was home to a series of mosaics called Oculus. Each mosaic was of one eye of 300 New York City schoolchildren: perhaps a blue-gray iris and small pupil surrounded by an uneven corona or a reddish-brown iris half covered by a heavy upper lid. The central piece was a large, oval mosaic on the floor of the station's entrance—a map of the world, inlaid by a map of Manhattan. In the center is another eye, from which rings of white tile spiral out to the edges, like ripples in water.

Our last weekend together we stayed at her absent friend's loft in Tribeca. In the day we saw an exhibit of Persian painting. She took a bath in a claw-foot tub before dinner, and later we had drinks and followed the riverwalk to Battery Park. As a baby in Pakistan her father had sung to her in their courtyard at night. Lulled by the quietly enduring scent of jasmine, she would lay her head on his shoulder and close her eyes, safe asleep in his arms.