

# Return to Sender



By Arantxa Villa

## RETURN TO SENDER

By fourth year Anna Van Ekeren

Dear birth mom,  
did you cry,  
when it happened,  
were you as broken and lost as I?

They say I was left on the steps of the orphanage,  
wrapped in a baby blue blanket, a bottle of milk by my side.

No note, no identification.  
Just a whisper of affection.

A trace of direction.

Dear birth mom,  
Am I your reflection? An abstraction or objection.

God, I have so many questions –

What did I do?

To deserve this.

Where are you?

Who are you?

I hate you.

I love you.

Dear birth mom,  
I think about you. When shadows crawl and voices roar.  
During Lunar New Year, at any Asian content, in the mirror.  
A haunting presence I cannot shake.  
An invisible tie I cannot break.

My blood carries the weight of your history.  
My DNA is a derivative of your narrative.  
And yet, I do not know the face that bears my resemblance,  
or the laugh that echoes mine.  
I do not know the hands that nurtured me,  
and silently abandoned me to hope and time.

Dear birth mom,  
Do you curl into a ball when overwhelmed,  
and love the taste of rain and reading at night?  
Do you scream into endless voids,  
and drown out the world beneath the waves?  
Is your voice croaky and strained by design,  
or is it flowing and beautiful, an enchanting mind?  
Are you good at puzzles and logic,  
or do words and phrases stick?  
Do you flee from crabs and spiders,  
and escape your troubles overseas,  
only to learn infinity was just out of reach?  
Don't you understand?  
I don't even know who I am.

Dear birth mom,  
I don't belong.  
Not here, after 21 years.  
It's marking unknown on medical forms,  
and numbly repeating 'I'm sorry.'  
It's the sideways stares and backward glares,  
whenever I walk in public with my white parents.  
It's the lack of connection to my culture,  
– I can't even utter a proper syllable in Chinese, yet my white mom speaks it fluently –  
masked by a deep desire for understanding and community.  
It's the constant displacement of living two lives, two identities,  
and never existing as either,  
never being enough of one or the other.

Dear birth mom,  
Where have you gone?  
I'm still searching,  
for some kind of sign,  
of a hereditary line.

Dear birth mom,  
Can you mend this bond?

Dear birth mom,  
Thank you.

For all that you've done.



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