

CIELO LUTINO

Where I'm Really From

THE ORIENT

Perhaps it's here. This place overseas. In relation to the The Main Land, it's minor, sub, a colony, Second or Third World, developing and emerging. Foreign and exotic where banana trees sway and mangoes are abundant. It's green, overgrown, tropical, this place where my feet are bound for the emperor. This place where my hut sits by the rice paddy, where there is dog on the table every night. This place where I pour tea and kneel and be demure. This place where I am a lady, a Dragon Lady that rises and kung-fus your ass. (I'll fry your rice real good.) This place where I become a Lotus Blossom desiring your Jade Stalk. This place where I write haikus. This place where I choke on the foam peanuts in the box I'm packaged in. (The orders arrived yesterday; I'll be a bride next week). This place where the war was won or lost, I forget which, and a GI fathered and left me here—you remember that. This place where I look like Thuy Nguyen or Wang Chien or Zenaida Elloso—Jesus, who can tell them apart? This place where I excel at math. This place where you call; I answer and fix your computer. This place where I'm packing boxes for my move to your neighborhood, which I plan to ruin. This place where I hope you'll adopt me. This place where I steal jobs from your country. This place where I sweat and work in a factory. This place where they drop a fork to give me my name: *ping pang pong!* This place where I'm legal. This place where, wow, don't I speak very good English.

THE SOUTH

No, it's not here, though kudzu grows over electric poles and abandoned houses, turns the landscape into a green sea shimmering beneath humid air. It's a wet heat; let's say it's tropical. But no, it's not here. Because I don't have an accent. Because my father never joined the Navy. Because it isn't where my mother read me Cinderella or where I watched *Captain Kangaroo* in my Wonder Woman underpants. It isn't where I cheated like a dog on the final exam because I couldn't fail trig, no way. It isn't where I did the hokey pokey and turned it all around. It isn't where we asked an old guy to buy us Mad Dog (he did) and my friends and I tasted it and said, *Like, barf to the max!* but drank it anyway. It isn't where the ocean in July was like bathwater but still I waded in, floated like a dead man. It isn't where I feathered my hair. It isn't where I laughed when the ball rolled be-

tween Bill Buckner's legs. It isn't where I went to 4-H camp two summers in a row. It isn't where I grew up like everyone else.

SWEDEN

Yeah, Sweden. My family goes back a couple of generations. Can't you tell? I mean, you know, my hair's blond, ha ha, kinda dark, right, but you'd be surprised what passes for blond in Sweden. What? Yeah, I'm messing with you. I'm from Charleston, South Carolina. Where am I really from? Okay, you called it. Summerville—but it's right outside of Charleston. What? Okay, *okay*. Man, you are relentless. Ladson, okay? It was crazy. Like, we lived in this subdivision called Summerville Place, but really it was in Ladson. Yeah. Ladson. Weird, huh. Wait, what? Where are my *ancestors* from? Whoa, dude, are you, um, ESL? It's like you don't speak English or something. I said, here, pal. Right here. This is where I'm from.