

Broken Language

I. My father moved to the States way before I was born. He came here to seek a better life for my sister, and he did not know that my mother was pregnant with me at the time. The house that I grew up in was small and filled with gratitude. My mother liked to brew tea every morning to remind herself of what it smelled like in Korea. The sweet aroma wafted around the house and landed right outside my bedroom door. When I woke up, my sister was already awake and smiling. I have never been to Korea.

II. My mother used to tell me that she loved me all the time. The words seized meaning, capturing thousands of stars to cluster them into one galaxy. Sometimes the light extinguished and the sun would fall into the ground, losing its understanding. I always said it back. "*Saranghaeyo*[1]," the moon would say. But love was never enough.

III. My sister liked to go outside. She hated the feeling of being home. I wanted to ask her if America was home to her when her birthplace was 6,671 miles away. I could not ask her, for she was never home. I liked to stay inside my room, which had a shelf full of books. The tip of my finger skimmed the spine of a book, and I picked it up to hold the fragile words in the palm of my hands. I tried reading the cover that was written in a different language I had not grown used to. I grew exasperated with myself, and I threw it against the wall.

IV. I did not get to see my father a lot. I knew that something was wrong between our relationship as I felt shame crawl up my spine whenever my father spoke words that made no sense. His sentences slurred together, and I could feel myself shrinking away, hiding in embarrassment. He stood behind the counter, talking to the cashier. His hands were up in the air as if he was conducting an orchestra, motioning for a certain sound. I watched him struggle, yet he would not show it. I knew he was frustrated, so he never talked to me unless it was to call my name.

V.I tried to make them proud. I came home with straight A's on my report card, and they would laugh. I showed them stories that I wrote, and they stared at the ink dyed pages in confusion. I felt like a fish swimming in a tide. Trapped in my own skin, I did not know who I was. I never made them proud. I was a disappointment.

VI.I taught them English and in exchange, they taught me Korean. They yelled when I did not pronounce a word right, but I was patient. I taught my father how to say I love you. I taught my mother how to say you're welcome because I was forever thankful. They smiled when they received my report card.

VII.My father talked to me for the first time. He told me that he loved me. My mother held me for the first time. Her hands were laced with affection as she hugged me closer. My sister came home for the first time. That night, she slept in the same bed as mine. I fell asleep in the crevices of the moon's crater. I could feel the light reflecting my happiness on the tide. I no longer felt shame; I felt pride. Maybe love was enough.

[1] Korean for "I love you."