

Left Unsaid

They exist above a stream of silent forgiveness. She does not remember the last time she apologized to her mother, does not remember the last time her mother apologized to her, although there have been more than enough transgressions on both sides.

Perhaps it's the language barrier: she likes to tell people that her first language was Chinese, but the the tones bump off her tongue now, stilted after she embraced her American books, American shows, American friends, was lured away by Romanized alphabets spilling over blank plains. She cannot recall the time that her mother tongue flowed easily, but her family likes to remind her that it existed. She opts not to speak it whenever possible; language and expression are her lifeboat and the thought of having it submerged under silk inflections sends a jolt of terror through her vocal chords. Her mother, on the other hand, is easily fluent in both languages, has to be after nearly three decades of living, working, loving on Western soil. In fact, her Chinese is now often pebbled with American words and expressions. Nonetheless, scientific jargon flows far easier in English than emotion does. Thus, their arguments are bilingual. Maybe apologies are hard enough without having to traverse the space between tongues.

Perhaps it's the culture: it almost feels antiquated or stereotypical for her to say the words "honor" or "saving face" out loud, and yet she feels their presence seething between chopsticks and floorboards. She loves Chinese television, loves Chinese food even more, but the true impact of her family's culture is too subtle to spot on the surface. The idea of begging forgiveness sends a tight feeling through chests and across shoulder blades, like a hug of shame, *honor* clutching her lungs in a vice grip each and every time.

Perhaps it's the pride: they are both so proud. She is her mother's daughter, shares the same genes for excellence, or maybe just the expectations of it. Their family succeeds, struggles

to imagine a different path. Balks at the thought of errors, hides in the face of them. Perhaps if they never acknowledge it, the possibility that they caused harm, then it was never real to begin with.

And yet, they continue on. They survive. With every delivery of warm tea when it is 11 p.m. and the work remains wide awake, with every hand tentatively rested on a shoulder, with every uncelebrated compromise, there persists a breed of peace. Through every “what are you working on?,” through every abrupt change of subject, through every peaceful silence, there breathes a declaration of love in any and every language.