



"my american alphabet"
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is evidence of the offenses I now plead guilty to,
a list of felonies counting since my infancy.
I can criticize the Latin lords
and the fault of cartographers
but it cannot change the fact that my voice is American
without a trace of my grandmother's accent,
without a single phrase I can redeem in Vietnamese.
There is shame like
epistrophe
that repeats at every family gathering where I run
into the bathroom
because I can only offer silence
to the Great Aunts and Uncles that gave up everything for me.
Lại ăn chiều! my Má screeches
and I don't argue. I don't need to
when my body finds rhythm with
the cacophony of metal chopsticks
and the syncopation of our loud conversations.
The unspoken upholds our promise
when I am reminded of a bond, an in-between
that is free of burden
where our heritage is in the hands of a chef and
our family is in the fold of a napkin,
where our food is every bridge and shortcut and ship,
the chère held forever in the
pocket of our stomachs,
in the Eden of our liver.
Reminiscent of a love deeper than the words I don't have,
there are stories that wake in the salty wonders of
nước chấm where an ocean and her tears
are at the center of every table,
where voices rebirth in every spoon of bún bò Huế
that scalds my throat and
I know that
with immigrant
comes dismemberment
comes the mar of a diaspora's dialogue
comes my distant English on some end of the escape.
There was always
a reverence for what only hands could create but our whole bodies remember.
No matter what words I use
they cannot say all there is to be said
and all there is to be held,
but I can taste them for myself,
take them into my very being.
This is the love I know
that no language can even begin to translate.