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House of Sharing Comfort Women

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House of Sharing

Comfort Women

Cards are worn smooth
from playing, 5 for luck,
5 for fortune.

She drank from pots filled
with rice wine, pulled quilt
over mouth to cover her smell,
listened to Nam Insoo through
blanket, stack of songbooks piled
by the foot of her *yoh*.

*I can forget everything when I sing,
when the blood is burnt up.*

She thinks people without children
should be cremated.

*3 pine trees. my parents
thought they sent me to a good place.
my hands like rubber gloves.
my heart bleeding.*

I was 14. Stones in the small village
painted with temples and faces. Flash
flood melts the road into a river.

She danced like this, hands flicking, hip jut,
shoulder slant, wrinkles filling her eyes.

She cooks white corn over a portable
stove, wipes the stain of red pepper
from the concrete windowsill, thin
tissue shredding in her fingers.

At the sill, she tells us to keep
secrets from your man, even if
he is good. *No one should open
all your contents. Contents. You don't
even know the word* contents? She sucks
her teeth and closes the window.

She dances, ash falling from her cigarette,
a cupful of Macculi splashing upraised,
between puffs she tilts her head and smiles,
laugh like a cackle.

She pounds the *goh* drum shifting
her ample hips, a Japanese student
dancing the snake, flicking tongue,
strumming a half beat between songs,
not wanting to stop, she says she can
go on forever.

The pigtailed Japanese girl points
at her ruby ring, she pulls it off
swiftly and pushes it into the young
girl's palm, like nothing.

This *halmoni*, her silver streaked
hair marcelled down her neck, in a *han
bok* of 5 layers like a white lotus.

They cut her open because she was too small.
With rusted scissors. Virgin. Doctor first
to enter her after the operation.

She ate rice balls prone on a stone bed,
thin mattress, one washcloth to rinse
between soldiers. She was beheaded
if she bit down.

I cannot reconcile this *halmoni*
with a girl 50 years ago, lips like pressed heart,
neck long as reed, who never learned to write
her own name, this *halmoni*, bundled thick
in 2 wool coats, bus ticket clenched
tightly in gloved fist to attend her hundredth rally,
pushing the glass-covered police young enough
to be her grandsons, to be in spitting distance
of the Japanese embassy.

She draws a painting larger than herself
of a soldier in mustard green, strapped
to a cherry blossom tree with black barbed wire,
guns pointed at his chest from 3 directions,
white doves taking flight from its branches.

A painting of a hand picking ripe plum,
inside each one the face of a young Korean girl,
hair plaited in two thick braids, inside each plum, one girl.



Ceremonial Vessels, Kathmandu, Nepal, 1988
Linda S. Connor