

Lost in Chinatown

by Patricia Chen

My identity is held together by a series of dashes,
A jumbled code only some understand.

And only some will understand the pain of being held together by wiry stitches.
The pain of unintentionally erasing a piece of themselves,
In search of something that better glues their loose parts together.
The pain of scratching at the mind's interior,
Relentlessly digging for eternity for one of the many voices lost within their own head.

Perhaps it's the fault of a young, oblivious child.
Being introduced to a new world,
With new voices, new views, new tongues.
A new identity.

Can we blame society's washing machine?
Rinsing the child of the old world,
wringing her dry?
Hung on a wire to be freshened, as the breeze whisks away any last droplets of the tattered child.

Society hands her a needle and chicken wire, preparing her to stitch herself up once she starts to remember.

She explores a worn out street with heavy pockets.
Stained windows reveal shelves upon shelves of dried roots, and traditional medicine.
Seagulls and geese rest on brick ledges overlooking streets that house dumpling businesses,
\$10 hair perms, and polished jade pendants.

In the nooks of the alleyways, there are doors that lead to butcher shops filled with chilled flesh, loading docks for struggling grocers, and kitchens with overworked parents.

Red lampposts line the asphalt as a towering structure marks the entrance to the street;
Vancouver Chinatown Millennium Gate.

Xie Shan roofs cut the air as orange tiles contrast with blue sky.
She can envision the dances of decorated lions coursing through the street.

An old woman's face filled with harsh wrinkles taps her shoulder,
Breaking the trance.

"Do you speak Chinese?"

A choked sound doesn't escape.

The old woman walks away, and in a desperate attempt to follow the woman, she trips from the weight of her pocket.

In a frenzy, she clutches the needle and wire, furiously digging into the frayed splits on her skin.

This anguish was so *newfound*.

Yellow flickered from lampposts as dusk poured over the quaint town.

What was left of her?

Piles of detached memories.

Faint visions of her younger self.

Tangled chicken wire, and the damned needle that came with it.

I sat in a red pool that matched Chinatown's red lampposts.

Perfectly.

I look around at my darkened surroundings.

I find myself lost in the alleyways of Chinatown.

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