

# Mother, Mutter, Matter

by Nancy Kang

A circle of smeared butter melts a fading smile on a hot pan  
when we ate her sweet rice pancakes studded with raisins,  
dusted with cinnamon like a spray of perfume or a sloppy subway sneeze.  
Cold rice, clumped like prayers, made our lunches stick to the bones.  
Mingling rough laughter and small fears on a savage tender tongue  
she tasted the tasks she scraped out of each day like melon rinds  
or cataracts grown over eyes that turned away from sirens, street fights,  
and pricey organic berries in stiff paper bags that looked so good she cried.  
So tired, the bottoms fell out of words some days, most dinners felt like  
chewing newspaper, the bed an antiseptic tank in which floated  
her body, serenely tethered to those butterfly blue pills the doctor  
said would "lift her spirits" like cellophane crackling between skilled hands  
when a gift is wrapped and tied in a taut, taught bow. Her limbs  
would kick out suddenly like octopus tendrils in the night, oozing black ink  
like the signatures she made on all our forms, permissions, detention slips,  
forgeries, admissions trips, and the wondrous arabesques of small power  
and willful presence she never knew she had in her hands or the  
woodpecker red head she carried high even though it was us who bought  
the wrong color to cover her greys and whites and dim flakes of passing seasons.

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