

# We Are Foreigners

By Ella Brown

***“A mothers embrace, suffocating in its grip of control.”***

***-Amy Tan***

It's cold and tidy here in this room.

The air is freshly febrezed,

And the walls are painted white.

There is a single window overlooking the city,

And a cloudy, sliding glass door.

Sitting on the carpeted cubicle floor,

I search for something interesting here,

Though I can't find it.

But stuffed in the very back of a rusted file cabinet,

Behind all her letters and reports,

There is a photo album,

And one memory falls out of the sheets.

1975. October 31st. Halloween.

I wish I could say she got to enjoy other holidays,

Before work had taken its place.

In my hand,

The damp, vintage photograph,

Felt like my own memory.

Tinted yellow page,

Stern stance from elders,

Blue script on the back.

***“Kwok Mui and Kwok Chon on Halowen 1975.”***

The new settlers stood in front of an off white trailer,

Surrounded by crisp brown grass.

Did Popo know that when she shut the single trailer door,

That it would close off more than just space?

I see Tai Gong\* on the end,

Wearing a homemade suit and red work tie,

With white shoes turned brown.

He stood coldly shoulder to shoulder with Tai Po\*.

She had a black homemade dress,

with felted buttons down the front.

Strange smirk on her face,

her hand reached over my mother's chest,

Making the heirloom gold watch dangle loosely on her wrist.

My Mother. Strapped in Tai Po's grip,

Standing straight in two pigtails,

and a blue hippie dress with a large heart cutout in front.

Proudly, she stood in her white collared under-shirt,

And bright blue clearance Vans with black ankle socks.

A cheery youthful smile bore widely across her face,

Which caused her cheeks to puff, and her eyebrows to fade into her forehead.

My Uncle next to her in his father's work shirt,

and his cowboy "shotgun,"

a brown stick.

Popo on the end,

In a Bright pink dress with unusable pockets,

And small, black leather shoes.

Her day-old perm curls,

Already falling out of shape,

As she stood next to a short and skinny shrub.

Her coldness,  
a battleground where you fought wars without drawing blood.  
Invisible borders,  
Visible scars,  
Did Popo know this would be your last Halloween?  
Growing up, my mother always wanted to be “normal,”  
Though her tinted yellow skin and slanted eyes give her away.  
And although her whole family dressed same as everyone, talked the same, acted the same,  
She always looked out of place in the frame.  
My mother says she's a foreigner,  
And I believe it now.  
Her memories,  
Forgotten in the back of a rusted file cabinet,  
Filled to the brim with poorly preserved polaroids,  
Left to collect dust,  
And fill the room with a musty, stale aroma upon opening.  
Did Popo know they were stuffed away from eyes reach,  
Hidden like the words you never said in your yearly phone call?  
I wish I could say I am not like Popo,  
But I've been told I am.  
I too,  
Speak the language of unshed tears.  
And although i've known you fifteen years now Popo,  
I feel as if I don't know you at all.  
My mother says she's a foreigner.  
She says her name is “Dana,”  
Even though it hasn't always been.  
Mother. You made it. But at what cost?

To find a husband?

To make a family?

To buy a home, a home with sixteen doors,

Yet every single one,

Is shut.

Mother says she's a foreigner,

She says we are strangers in our new life.

She claims we are nomads in our own story.

She insists that we carry the weight of two worlds.

Mother says she's a foreigner,

So I guess that makes me one too.

Tai Gong– Mandarin word for “great-grandfather”

Tai Po- Mandarin word for “great-grandmother”

Popo- Mandarin word for “grandma”