The Unsaid Eulogy

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Cover Page Footnote

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Your aunts were beaten
for dating haoles
so they married natives.
You married Brad
and your father nearly disowned you
yet ten years later
the Korean and Okinawan parents
and the non-Hawaiian parents
met over roast pig and lomilomi salmon
and a beer called Primo.

You signed your own enlistment papers
because of your Air Force-bound friend Annette
and disgraced the family name
yet you were the one they called upon
to deliver your grandmother’s eulogy
in your newscaster English
because you’d lost the pidgin of your childhood.

My grandmother
doesn’t even know where I live.
She might be dead
for all I know,
and if she isn’t
she is blessed not to remember
the one who stooped so low
as to make her a great-grandmother
with an Arab who bows to Mecca.

Olive skin and all—
my mother has cousins darker than him.
Ph.D. and all—
he still dwells in the family’s mind-slums
as the keffiyeh-wearing, camel-riding
sand nigger
even though Damascus,
the seat of commerce and culture,
the world’s oldest capital,
is a thousand miles from the Arabian desert.
Thanksgiving 2001
fell during Ramadan
and the temple pillars fell
when turkey waited until sunset at 5 p.m.

Dad came in worn out jeans,
baggy sweatshirt and holey slippers,
dressed worse than any homeless person we’d seen
haunting the Paris train stations.
He came for the grandkids
yet the seven-year-old cried
when he heard all the yelling,
and the three-year-old,
wide-eyed on the couch,
whispered, “Grandpa said a bad word!”

Over his dead body and Mom’s
will I ever say my grandmother’s eulogy,
unless she outlives them both.

Maybe by then I’ll be fifty,
with a proud head of silver for birds to nest in,
like Maxine Hong Kingston,
and I’ll have harnessed my chi.
Because right now,
with the few gray hairs like yours
on the eve of your thirty-fifth birthday,
I seethe and boil over
and scald everything I touch.