

## Child of the Ashes

By - Penelope Duran

Across the sea, the syllables of my mother's tongue feel foreign  
as they twist upon my amateur lips.  
Delicacies of that distant shore cause my stomach to lurch.  
A bird from the lychee tree sings an unintelligible lullaby  
as unfamiliar as the words which my mother used to sing.  
If only I could sift this half of myself  
from the mixture in the melted bowl.

One day, an incense lit. Heritage slowly catching fire,  
failing to capture the intonation, as they say I am a fraud,  
that I am not truly *Việt* until  
their melodic language echoes in the chamber of my jaw.  
With my curly hair and tone-deaf ears  
the suffering of my ancestors burns to ashes  
consumed by the flames of a new society  
as I retrieve the kindling and attempt to honor them.

Grandma digs for a wayward memory in her broken English,  
the way my fractured Vietnamese rests in my mouth.  
Filled with the shame of the ancestral ghosts,  
mourning how they've disintegrated,  
without an urn to conserve their legacy,  
my past lost to the breeze.

Maybe my heritage is not a martyr of days long gone. I read pages  
of my great grandfather's diary; he knew French  
possibly better than his native Vietnamese, proving that the past  
does not crumble in conflict with another culture.  
The old country endures; ashes nourish the next generation's bloom.