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tell me, what does it mean to feel safe?

a safe space —
a place in which a
person or
category of people
will not be exposed to harm.

in the 1850s, after the abolition of slavery, white people looked for others to do their work. in the 1850s, laborers cheap enough to offer a reason to hire Chinese were lied to in hordes, whipped on the tracks for trying to leave their inhumane jobs, dying in 3s for every 2 tracks of railroad.



tell me, when did this country ever once let us trust it would not expose us to harm?



then, the 1870s:
my people came (were brought)
to do the work (nobody else wanted to) in droves.
the white laborers grew
crimson with rage,
"they are taking our (American) jobs!" they screamed,
torching Chinatowns scarlet and
lynching our men.

i wonder, gripping knuckles so red they turn white, how many of us had *nowhere left*. by the 1880s, this land housed 200 Chinatowns reduced to wood ash, re-absorbed by the earth as nutrients to give new life. i think of my people, deferential, even in suffering, always making sure we leave something everywhere we are guests.

stillness, i realize, is a luxury we are not all afforded; after all, movement is a choice when you are able to rest.

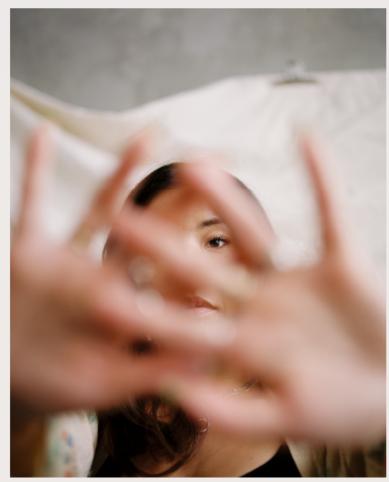






like low tide and crescent moons, our spaces come and our spaces go.

i think of the Japanese that took root in the 1890s, while the Chinese were ripped from their ground, of the 40 Japantowns they built, of how, after the 1940s, they *collapsed* into 3. i think of how they were forced to give up their land, their homes, *their lives*, for a war they couldn't see.





tell me, how many times have my people paid this country's price for wars they couldn't see?

in the 50s: how the U.S. split a country by its 38th parallel to "maintain its influence on the peninsula." in the 60s: how a war stopped by daisies caused 3 million of our people to die, in the 70s: how the Hmong fought for their lives after the "political climate changes"

and the U.S. Army boots quietly take their leave.





in the decades after,
we reduce the richness of the
Korean, Vietnamese, and Lao
to the word *refugees*.
we give them
a world without housing, documentation, or health,
ask them to pay the cost of living
for our hollow promise of safety.

my lips stumble around the words Asian American, a battle cry when uttered in the 60s. these days, it reads to me like something that kills you even as you beg to be seen.





safety, i realize, is a luxury we are not all afforded; after all, you must not want to hurt us to make a space where we can simply just be.