



Poetry Reading

By San Mateo County 2024 Poetry Out Loud Champion

Chloe Chou

Tuesday, April 23, 2024

About the poet:

Chloe Chou published her first novel, *The Phaeton Complex*, in 2020. Since then, she's continued to be involved in the world of literature. Chloe served as the Daly City Youth Poet Laureate and the South San Francisco Youth Poet-in-Residence from April 2022 - April 2023. During her time in these terms, she founded an online youth literary magazine, *Cloudy*, which has received over 550 submissions from around the world. She also wrote and published South San Francisco Library's first poetry chapbook: *The Long Way Home*. In this past year, she has been honored as the California Youth Poet Laureate Runner-up, along with receiving a certificate of recognition from the California State Senate for her positive community work in San Mateo County. Recognized as the Daly City Youth of the Year in 2022, Chloe has also been chosen as the San Mateo County 2024 Poetry Out Loud Champion and the California Poetry Ourselves Runner-up. In addition, she has been recognized nationally as a JUST POETRY!!! winner, and internationally as a Bennington Young Writers Awards Finalist.

ars poetica with baba's eighty-five inch tv

I am always afraid but things are never the same.
cantilevered to my hometown I ask my baba about
the taste of chicken knuckles – he looks at me scandalized.
split-faced & rooted in an american taste he says to me
欣儀, *how you learn a dish like that?* I am all tongue-
twisted. my teeth rotting in my silvered mouth, I look
away. he sighs, speaks again: 欣儀, *I am an esl.*
english is not my first. I know this already. my teachers told me
this in elementary school, the cartilage in my knees crackling
for my american appetite – breakfast sausage and honeyed
eggos for days. I tell him, *sorry, baba.* he smiles at me slowly,
face unlatching to a toothed voice box.

I am writing this poem because I don't know what else to say.
every chinese new year I am buried under the incense from
the temple next to an ikea. every chinese new year me & baba fill
up the offering table with jellies from 99 ranch. we watch the
zodiac predictions on his eighty-five inch tv that was half-off
at costco. watch the reminders of matriarchy in our homes.
forget the syllabled necklace around my throat is our bloodline:
half of its nerves can be used to play the guitar, the other half can
be sold to buy four cycles at the washing machine. no, that just
won't do – the zodiac predictor says only numbers in multiples of
eights are lucky. like 16. like 40. like 88. 88, or in chinese, *ba ba.*

I am ending this poem now because I have written twenty-three lines
and I still know nothing more about my language. because my brother
& I were glass children. I had read his expressions once and
found nothing there but a fear of drowning; his legs tangled in salty
liquid, his ribcage expanding for oxygen. his body sixty percent water
but still unable to accept the atoms outside – how I prayed our baba
would teach us to swim one day. but all he told us was *there is nothing*
noble in water. how I prayed he could teach me the workings of our country,
wrap me in the red flag of his northbound city. but he said to me *no* 欣儀,
this color is only blood. how I prayed to tear his eighty-five inch tv apart,
ripping the circuit boards from blue & green wire, ask my baba how something
so desecrate could be a mosaic of my mechanical wanting. where the eighty-five
is only half eight, half *ba*, meaning only half lucky. how I prayed for salted egg yolks
and smoked grasshoppers from home, only for baba to say to me, 欣儀, *stop.*
stop with your wanting. we are in the beautiful country now.

欣儀: *a mandarin name*