

Go Tell Your Mom, “I Love You.”

I want to know:
do you still believe in the American Dream?

You say you are happy, but I hesitate to let go of the what ifs
tangled in old 4x6 photographs and half-finished English textbooks.

When the guilt rinses me of my fury, a pot of resentment abandoned on the back-burner,
I remember you left everything behind city walls for a life that only existed in movies.

You signed up for language classes and wrote con mèò next to C-A-T
until the bell rang and you found work in service jobs that needed no degree.

From brown leather massage chairs, I watched you soak your body with the scent of acetone and OPI,
scrubbing feet and cutting cuticles for twelve hours a day, six days a week,

no breaks a year. You are not the owner or decision maker: you are an average worker.
When the internet celebrated Anjelah Johnson, your clients thought of you and laughed too.

Parent-teacher conferences scared me, and I became a hypocrite who finished
each stuttering sentence you started. You flushed red, and so did I.

You thought you hid your weeping well, but I felt it echo inside me
before the walls could give out and confront me with what I already knew.

There is no house, no miracle. America has kept you chained to labor,
trapped to one bedroom apartments, brought you back to chemical warfare.

Is this still your American Dream?

Your hunched body, calloused hands, armored heart—
your daughter is a poet

who cannot give you this dream but will forge a new one
using the language you allowed me to breathe.

I am running for three. You, me, and the young girl
who heard of the land of the free.

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