

Chamberlain Rd.

by Eunhee Soh

I dreamed of going to the dorm house on Chamberlain Rd. I turn left to the corner after walking through the leafy trail of the campus. The afternoon lights on the burnt brown shrubs hit my eyes. In the row, the semi-detached Victorian houses with three-sided bay windows stand symmetrically. Sunshine discolours the front façade and the brick trim above the porch drops the arched shadow on the entrance door. My fingers brush the popcorn surface of the stucco wall before searching for the key. No, I don't have it. My tote is full of diapers, baby wipes, and Avent feeding bottles, making hollow noises. No keys in my bag.

I dream again of Chamberlain Rd. I push the stroller that my baby daughter's in, snuggling in a blanket. Digging in my tote, I watch the wind fill the curtain up through the opened window. My neighbor, Soojin, would be in the dining room with her toddler daughters. Her round forehead brims with joy. Each room has a door to keep the privacy intact. Opening and closing the doors in the narrow hallway of our dorm, I adjust myself to individualism. But sheer curtains wrinkle boundaries; the penetrating fabrics at the windows display personal spaces in public. I touch the frayed edge of the white organdy.

The day before my family and I departed from England, Rachel shortly stopped by our place on Chamberlain. Her tall posture leaned toward me, gripping the bicycle handles. She never wore skirts even though she would have when she was a faculty member at the Law Department. As a retired scholar, she kept no adornments on her. Her simple short haircut and the bouncy voice told me her devotion to others. *Where will you settle down after arriving in the US?* Her smile erased the shadows within me.

I'd invited Rachel, Mary, and Lucy to tea just a week before that afternoon. It was the chance to serve them for they'd done so for years. *You Koreans make things beautiful*, Mary said, holding a colorful refreshment that I made. On Thursdays, Lucy served lovely homemade cakes with tea for the international women who came for the Bible study, Mary shared Bible verses, and Rachel gathered them together. Many wives and girls from diverse backgrounds came to Lucy's doorstep. I was deeply impressed when Rachel prayed for North Korea which I'd rarely do. Her compassion for the vulnerable amid the global conflicts, wars, and disasters reminded me we were connected to them.

Now, the invisible threat of getting the coronavirus permeates our community. It's like living with a ghost filtering through our bodies, the traceless certainty of our fear, suspect, and detachment. I emailed Rachel in this pandemic, but the emails returned to me. Our correspondence paused in 2017. Her gray hair blows in the wind. She'll be safe, praying wherever she is. I reluctantly type her full name in United Kingdom Obituaries online. In another tap of my laptop screen, Red Cross workers in Italy bend over the deathbed in a contaminated room where the patient's death could become theirs. They share death, terror, grief, and complexity of the restriction. They represent us who've already been affiliated with the virus. Death is everywhere, every moment. In *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, O'Connor writes, "if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life," she [we] would've been good enough to recognize we're connected. Dying every moment, we become one as the volunteers. The imminent death in people's faces is overlapping mine. I am responsible for somebody's death in the constant ambulance sirens.

Rachel's bike bell sounds lightly through the cold air. She waves back to me.



Eunhee Soh was born and raised in South Korea, she earned her PhD in Korean Literature emphasized on contemporary poetry at the Sungshin Women's University. Her poems, including 'The Evening Birth' and others, were published in *Literary Village* (*Munhak Dongne*) in 1999. She moved to England and immigrated to the U.S. She lives in Pleasanton, California, with her husband and two daughters.

