

Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

## LOST SISTER

1

In China,  
even the peasants  
named their first daughters  
Jade—

5 the stone that in the far fields  
could moisten the dry season,  
could make men move mountains  
for the healing green of the inner hills  
glistening like slices of winter melon.

10 And the daughters were grateful:  
they never left home.

To move freely was a luxury  
stolen from them at birth.  
Instead, they gathered patience,

15 learning to walk in shoes  
the size of teacups,  
without breaking—  
the arc of their movements  
as dormant as the rooted willow,  
20 as redundant as the farmyard hens.

But they traveled far  
in surviving,  
learning to stretch the family rice,  
to quiet the demons,

25 the noisy stomachs.

2

There is a sister  
across the ocean,  
who relinquished<sup>1</sup> her name,  
diluting jade green

30 with the blue of the Pacific.

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<sup>1</sup> *relinquished* — gave up; surrendered

Rising with a tide of locusts,  
she swarmed with others  
to inundate another shore.  
In America,  
35 there are many roads  
and women can stride along with men.

But in another wilderness,  
the possibilities,  
the loneliness,  
40 can strangulate like jungle vines.  
The meager provisions and sentiments  
of once belonging—  
fermented roots, Mah-Jongg<sup>2</sup> tiles and firecrackers—  
set but a flimsy household  
45 in a forest of nightless cities.  
A giant snake rattles above,  
spewing black clouds into your kitchen.  
Dough-faced landlords  
slip in and out of your keyholes,  
50 making claims you don't understand,  
tapping into your communication systems  
of laundry lines and restaurant chains.

You find you need China:  
your one fragile identification,  
55 a jade link  
handcuffed to your wrist.  
You remember your mother  
who walked for centuries,  
footless—  
60 and like her,  
you have left no footprints,  
but only because  
there is an ocean in between,  
the unremitting space of your rebellion.

—Cathy Song

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<sup>2</sup> *Mah-Jongg* — a game played with small pieces called tiles