My Reflection Shows

*Who is that girl I see? Staring straight back at me?*

I had just moved. Away from familiarity. Away from friends and school. Away from the juicy, wild berries. I was five at the time. Naive about everything, including my culture. My priorities lied with crayons, dry ramen, and of course my mother’s Chinese fairy tales.

My new house was perfect, but not familiar. But I adjusted well. I had my family and they were the core of any familiarity I needed. Life resumed as well as my naivety. I went to the local elementary, made friends, and brought dry ramen for snack at least once a week. Every night, before I went to bed, my mother would tell me the story of Stone Monkey or the Magpie Bridge.

Never once was I worried about my cultural identity. I saw a potential friend in everyone I meet in class. Just as many children do. One day we had show and tell. I brought my favorite Chinese book. I told the class how my mama was Chinese and showed off the fairytales that lulled me to sleep every night.

The next day, two boys from my class came up to me during recess. I was alone, playing in the sand under the slide, obscured from view. One of the boys kicked over my sand creation. The other one pushed me, saying things like *Chink*, *Squinty-eyes,* and derogatory terms I didn’t understand, that I don’t truly believe he understood either. At the end of recess I was left confused, unable to pinpoint how I felt. Unable to even cry. My mind was muddled with their shouts. My body could still feel the marks of their hands, pushing me endlessly. I tried to lock it away in my mind.

*Now I see, that if I were truly to be myself, I would break…*

The bullying increased everyday. Always the same two boys, but with new ways to mock my *Asian-ness*. The torment continued. I didn’t know how long I could live like this. I hid my tears in my pillow at night. I stopped begging my mom to read to me when she got home. I stopped bringing dry ramen for snack after the boys ridiculed me for it. I was bruised and battered inside. But still I never cried in front of them. Then one day I couldn’t hold it in anymore. I pushed back. He fell to the ground, angry. They left…..They came back, armed with sharp sticks. I told them to leave me alone. The hot tears welled in my eyes. I would not cry. I could not give them the satisfaction. They continued forward, heated words on top of another. Then there was pain. Several jolts of pain. The fire of pain seared my tear-soaked eyes. To this day, I still do not remember how long they attacked me. How long my back was stabbed. How long I prayed for the bell to ring. How long I cried under the slide. I locked it away. I remembered the pain. The nurse, questions, interrogations, my reluctance, and my fear at being in trouble for a crime that I imagined. But I came clean. The situation was resolved but at a cost. No more bullying and no more dry ramen. No pushing and no showing off my favorite Chinese Fairy Tales. It was the only way I could think of, that would prevent something like this from happening again.

*Why is my reflection someone I don’t know?*

It wasn’t until many years later when a spark was lit inside me. I met a group new group of friends. They inspired me with their full acceptance of themselves. They gave me a the push over the wall that I always feared to climb because of thorns. They were genuinely interested in what made me. They made me embrace the person I locked away so long ago. A person I thought I would never release into my soul. Slowly the tattered pieces that I swept under the rug began to re-emerge. Everyday. Every conversation. Every new spark forced the pieces together. Their friendship was the glue that I needed. I unlocked parts of my mind, bringing me back there, to the pain and happiness again. They placed me onto the path of acceptance. They made me feel whole again. I finally could truly accepted who I am inside, and it made me happy. Then for the first time in years, I asked my mom to read me Magpie Bridge while I munched on dry ramen.

And finally *my reflection shows, who I am inside...*