

Middle Name

By Chloe Chang – Poolesville High School

There is a garden growing with white forsythia and petrichor,
plum blossoms and *mugunghwa*, in my name.

There is the sound of banging drums, cracking of fresh bamboo *jeogalak*,
chopsticks, and the bubbling of Korean kimchi stew in my name.

Mother, her calloused hands and wrinkled eyes, calling *ddal*, daughter, before calling
my name.

You see birthmarks dotting a sea of olive skin, before you hear my name.

On foreign soil gardens are pruned, roots severed.
Squeezed, pressed, squashed into the middle, the new version of my name

Hides behind an initial, concealing leaves of ginkgo and persimmon branches,
a history of freedom fighters and farmers behind my name.

Yet after my last breath joins the heavy Mid-Atlantic wind, after
my tongue atrophies and my lips shrivel, what is left is only my name.

The same boom of hands against drums, harmony of soft flesh and splintering bamboo,
laughter around the dinner table, remains in my name.

Slithering in whispers, traveling through the West and crossing seas
until gales carry it back to the Kingdom of *Choseon*; my name.

With open arms I embrace the crackle of flames to join the symphony,
should Lady Liberty's copper torch set ablaze my name.

Translations:

Hanbok: Traditional Korean clothing

Mugunghwa: Common Hibiscus, the Korean national flower

Choseon: The last and longest imperial dynasty of Korea