BREAKING TRADITION

for my Daughter

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My daughter denies she is like me,
Her secretive eyes avoid mine.
   She reveals the hatreds of womanhood
   already veiled behind music and smoke and telephones.
I want to tell her about the empty room
   of myself.
This room we lock ourselves in
   where whispers live like fungus,
   giggles about small breasts and cellulite,
   where we confine ourselves to jealousies,
   bedridden by menstruation.
This waiting room where we feel our hands
   are useless, dead speechless clamps
   that need hospitals and forceps and kitchens
   and plugs and ironing boards to make them useful.
I deny I am like my mother. I remember why:
   She kept her room neat with silence,
   defiance smothered in requirements to be otonashii,
   passion and loudness wrapped in an obi,
   her steps confined to ceremony,
   the weight of her sacrifice she carried like
   a foetus. Guilt passed on in our bones.
I want to break tradition—unlock this room
   where women dress in the dark.
Discover the lies my mother told me.
The lies that we are small and powerless
   that our possibilities must be compressed
   to the size of pearls, displayed only as
   passive chokers, charms around our neck.
Break Tradition.
I want to tell my daughter of this room
   of myself
filled with tears of shakuhatchi,
the light in my hands,
poems about madness,
the music of yellow guitars—
sounds shaken from barbed wire and
goodbyes and miracles of survival.
This room of open window where daring ones escape.
My daughter denies she is like me
her secretive eyes are walls of smoke
and music and telephones,
her pouting ruby lips, her skirts
swaying to salsa, teena marie and the stones,
her thighs displayed in carnivals of color.
I do not know the contents of her room.
She mirrors my aging.
She is breaking tradition.