

& mama, i'm sorry, my sakura-pink has wilted. the petals you once tucked behind your son's ear have browned not from rot, but ripening. he brushed again my branches, seeking treasure i was never raised to hold. he pressed his lips on my forehead, a benediction; in return, i gave him my cheekbone & my tooth found his. mama, am i a bad son? he stripped me to my bare, so that i am white. white, by no means the snow-white purity of a bride's kimono you prayed for at new year, nor the alabaster of a crane—but blank & pallid & lacking hue. i am a trembling cup from which a sweetness i cannot name pours. with desperate hands, he stole a gold i never possessed: a gold you told me boys must protect to remain worthy. you taught me to fold myself into shapes a son should make, angles neat & obedient. yet, my limbs are exposed to his. mama, i cannot bear the fruit you expected. but i am blooming a strange & crimson flower. it is not peony for prosperity, but lotus for purity. i am blooming all the same.

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