

—+ **JALINA MHYANA** | August 6, 1946

*Dedicated to the Hibakusha (Japanese survivors of the atomic bombings)*

There's a grave for my mother  
at Hiroshima,  
where you can still see victims' shadows  
printed on the ground where they burned  
like photograms  
or black silhouettes against the sidewalks  
and buildings that would have caught their falls

Women who wore kimonos on August 6, 1945  
still have the flowered designs of the cloth  
photographed onto their aged flesh—  
cherry blossoms that never fade or fall,  
a promise of eternal springtime  
branding them Japanese

Those at Hiroshima and Nagasaki exchange letters  
of condolence with those from Auschwitz,  
people branded with numbers—  
whose loved ones fell to the poison air  
like the cherry blossoms that forever threaten to fall  
from the skin of the women who hide their losses  
beneath new fabric

That fall my father moved us to a farming collective  
in the country—  
my thinning hair and crimson-spotted face  
hidden as I bent to plant the baby rice shoots  
in a half foot of water that sucked me in by the ankles  
releasing the poisons from my roots

A year later now, August 6, 1946—  
I honour my mother who collected glass balls  
from the seashore like overgrown pearls,  
placing them throughout our garden  
like secrets that glimmered  
only once a day  
when the sun looked at them just right

In celebration I collect branches  
from the cherry blossom tree that messes up our roof  
every year when it relinquishes its beauty to the winds.  
Those blossoms were my mother's favourite—  
perfuming the ghosts  
that lurk around until they are invited out of the winds  
to warm themselves around the campfires of Oban.

The sun warms my back as I reach for each branch,  
face to face with a shadow  
that mimics my every move on the tree trunk—  
this silhouette with arms reaching high overhead  
grasping at petals just out of reach  
could be anyone at any moment—

A child catching a ball overhead,  
a father throwing his baby in the air,  
a ballerina tickling the sky's underbelly with tiny fingers,  
or my mother hailing the bus  
that never brought her home  
the day her shadow outlived her.