

Bleached. By Zuri Vang

My hair is black, my eyes are slightly slanted with shades of brown, and my skin is tanned
When they look at me they see honor student
Soon to be doctor
The engineer
Kung fu prodigy
Exotic
Foreign
Yet somehow don't see me as a person of color
Only counting me as one when they need statistics
But when the conversation turns to justice, they tell me I'm "practically" white
They rid me of my color
Beaching my skin with a silence meant to erase the stories of how we got here
Each time the bleach hits my skin it rips me of my identity, my culture, my history
They beg for the finished product
But can't handle the process
They want the food
The film
The music
But not the grit of starting over in country that's supposed to give us freedom
Yet
Treats us like an invasive species
Admiring the bloom while trying to poison the roots
Consuming parts of our culture they deem as aesthetic
But ignore the hands that scrubbed their floors
The mothers
And fathers
Who dug through Earth with hands so bloody it left the soil soaked
Leaving scars no one cares to notice
They traded their blood
Their oxygen
Their time
Their home
For a small house with a broken down roof and closed in walls
For the chance their children could live a better life than they did
Too different to be seen as equal
Imprisoned between identities
And a country that will never accept me.

