

## JENNIFER BAO YU JUE-STEUCK

### GOODNIGHT MOON, GOODNIGHT MOM

*We stand  
all of us drawn here  
by an invisible cord eons long  
awaiting the start of a ritual  
removed from its womb  
by distance and by hope. . .*  
—Janet Jue

*Writing is an act of hope.*  
—Isabel Allende

She is four years old. Mom reads her all-time favorite picture book, *Goodnight Moon*. Nestled under her Winnie-the-Pooh covers, her small head is sandwiched between Mom's outstretched arms, the book directly in front of her brown eyes. The green-and-red-colored pictures leap out, filling her with wonder and appreciation.

"Goodnight moon," coos Mom, softly petting her long brown hair. Goodnight Mom. Goodnight stars.

"Goodnight kittens," continues Mom, kissing the shiny wisps on her small head. She is nearly asleep. Her small fingers on her mother's firm arm detach, her eyes wilting shut like a flower folding from too much sun.

"Goodnight stars. Goodnight air." Mom's voice is softer now. Quiet.

"Goodnight, Mommy," says a half-asleep four year old as she yawns and Mom slips out of the covers, carefully and lovingly tucking them round her little frame, bending down to kiss her forehead. Strings of dark brown hair stick fuzzily above her head, defying gravity, on her faded Winnie-the-Pooh pillow.

Her miniature stomach rises and falls slowly with warm puffs of air. The light fades. The door creaks to its nearly closed position. A soft glow from

the hallway falls into her room, warning monsters to stay far, far away. The light leads to safety—like runway lights that guide airplanes back to earth in pitch-black, stormy nights. Straight to the 24/7 haven of Mom's protective embrace.

*Goodnight, Jen. See you in the morning.*

Goodnight, Mommy. Goodbye.

Mom tiptoes away, her figure a small blip in the dark.

*Then one morning, a hospice care worker arrives at the house just before dawn, just before two strange, scary men in black suits roll Mom out our front door, down our driveway, down the majestic mountain where our home kisses the California sky, down the long stretch of Highway 1 that cradles the coast and nearly dips into the deep blue of the Pacific, down and away . . . until nothing is left but the smell of Mom's perfume, a fog of memories, and the whisper of her voice reverberating in my heart.*

My name is Jennifer *Bao Yu* "Precious Jade" Jue-Steuck. I am thirty years old. My birthmother is from Jiangsu province, China. In 1979, when I was nearly two years old, I was adopted privately by an American couple from California, at a time when adoption of Chinese children was almost unheard of. It was a complex affair. Paperwork for my adoption was issued through Hong Kong and Taiwan, where my birthmother lived when I was born. My first tongue was Mandarin, followed by English (post-adoption), Cantonese (at Chinese school in California), French (from age seven at school), and a sprinkling of Californian Spanish.

During my childhood, I never gave much thought to being adopted—I was far too busy with homework, cross-country running, dance team, cello, and piano. But when my American mother died from the 'silent cancer' (ovarian) in 1999, I felt a *double loss* and experienced a *double mourning*: the loss of my mom, to whom I was very close and, to my astonishment, a second loss that sprang out of the blue, lurking in a place so deep and layered I didn't even know of its existence—the loss of my birthmother, the mother I never knew, yet whose breath, blood, and spirit make these words possible.