



WISHBONE

Poems by Priscilla Lee

Reviewed by Phillina Sun

It was a game. My brother and I would snap a turkey's wishbone in two and whoever held the larger piece won. *Expect good fortune*, Uncle Pothan said one Thanksgiving, a few weeks before he drove away in his black Corvette from Santa Ana; he wanted to fly airplanes in Minneapolis. I never saw him again, but I remember what he had said; that game is still irresistible. To whom will the fortune go? Crack the spine of *Wishbone*, a collection of poems by Priscilla Lee, and you'll discover unexpected luck - good, bad, and ambivalent. The stories are irresistible because Lee is not afraid to heed a suggestion within her poem titled "Advice from a Former Lover, An Artist": *Show your obsessions like a marquee/on opening night*.

Lee's obsessions include family, nationhood, and love; she attempts to bridge the gaps within memory, reaching towards what has been abandoned or vacated, the home or nation that has been left behind in the middle of the night, compelled by forces larger than one's life. Often the poems read as letters, bottle-capped and tossed, for those who cannot answer because they have (dearly) departed: a grandfather afraid of death, former lovers, the grandmother who raised her after her mother, a bride recently imported from Hong Kong, couldn't cope with the shock of the culturally displaced.

The shock of the unfamiliar is constant within these poems; details prickly with their strangeness. Because the familiar is heartbreaking (disease, death, emigration, abandonment by lovers), the characters of these poems seek solace in the unfamiliar, the strange aspects of the waking world. A lupus-inflicted woman tends a baby porcupine, M. Fook shows Lee a walnut carved with one hundred and eight bald-headed Buddhas, and the dead keep singing in a thrift-store music-box. Grandma reads fortunes and hides the almanac of life under her granddaughter's bed. Not only does storytelling occur within these poems but also fortune-telling: the reading of signs for the future.

And that is the crux to these stories: although traumatic moments are the catalyst for the stories behind these poems, Lee does not ask for pity. Instead she calls attention to the many ways through which signs of the past and the future occur; she reveals that luxury is finite. Acquire what is necessary, the knowledge that will make you survive the fortune acquired in life.

Curious? Purchase a copy of Priscilla Lee's *Wishbone* in our [Getitgirlstore](#).

