

The hiss of steamed milk
Clattering ceramic mugs
Rises over the din of chatter
I step into the bright garden
Enveloped by the warm amber incandescence
The wispy aroma of roasted coffee beans
Animated auras of so many colors
Undulating light even when
Storms surged outside the door
Three strides in towards the register
To make my order and
I am greeted with a 'welcome back'
Laced with familiarity
My name remembered for the
Twenty visits in the past four months
How can I resist the call of home
This diasporic brown daughter of refugees
Seeking belonging in a white world
A place of authenticity, unapology, grounding
I became another seedling in this garden
Of community resilience
Growing roots, extending, nourished by care
All through my CID childhood memories
In a place where love grew, flourished
Through stories, laughter, soft sweetened Ube cookies,
Late Sunday evening offerings of bread pudding
Homework headache in our six-some clique
To collective accountability and radical joy

In the silence of our work or the sharing of chisme
And interspersed conversations of identity politics
Bliss in solo six-hour study sessions
With soul-filling sips of soy matcha lattes
Pulling words from mind to pen ink to paper
Freely flowing, flowering
Creating narratives of truth for
Dismantling patriarchy, white supremacy
And all of colonization's damned blights
Tending the divine feminine
Womxn-centered anti-imperial resistance
This *rooted* power thrives
In a place where love kindled reciprocal healing
Hand shakes, hugs, kisses
Creating a crossroads of invisible threads
Turning strangers
To friends
To family
To even soulmates
Imagine my surprise
I didn't think that you would be here
Sitting the table over with your companions
After our first day of class
Or that it would be the start of
So many more meetings
Remember when you sat across from me
For the first time together
A bright, crisp autumn day

On what we'd later call a date
How we both looked up at the white ceiling
Quivering lips, stinging eyes
Swallowing the tears from grief
And grandmother's tenderness
And weeks later when we skipped class
After a late night 3-hour call of confessions
Deep set feelings, tempest unleashed
Of giant, genuine joy
Or when we shared a secret smile in these wooden seats
Reminiscing of last night's first kiss
Under the bitter cold January stars
Skin softly singing, shimmering
Under your gentle hands
Every time you ask my whereabouts and
Every time you come by
My heart beats a little harder
As you catch my eye and
With an ever-widening grin
Serenade alongside Snoh from the speakers
I'm a fool for you
I love you time and time again
I know just how the story ends
Here for the third time this month
Learning love languages in each other's company
Over ube macchiatos and cheesecakes
Rants and reflections
Words of power and affirmations

Supporting each other as growing scholars and revolutionaries

Who would've thought a small cookie

A cup of sweet coffee

Could inspire so much love

And unite phoenix spirits

Threads that continue to

Connect, intertwine, weave

In rhythm to the soft soulful R&B tunes echoing

Long after we've left beyond these walls

Thanks to Rory, Marijo

Anton, Mary Jo

And all the staff of this welcoming space

Settled in this small bakery

Called Hood Famous, better known as home