

Magic Island

Poem by **Cathy Song**



BACKGROUND

Although individual circumstances differ, immigrants share the experience of adapting to a new and unfamiliar environment. They must learn new behaviors and languages while keeping alive the traditions and values of their original cultures. Poet **Cathy Song** was born in Honolulu in 1955. Her grandfather came to Hawaii from China; her grandmother arrived from Korea in an arranged marriage. Their experiences inform many of Song's poems.

SETTING A PURPOSE

As you read, consider how the couple fits into their new culture and how their previous experiences affect their outlook. What is "magic" about the island?

A collar of water
surrounds the park peninsula
at noon.

Voices are lost

5 in waves of wind
that catches a kite
and keeps it there
in the air above the trees.

If the day has one color,

10 it is this:
the blue immersion of horizons,
the sea taking the sky like a swimmer.

The picnickers have come
to rest their bicycles



15 in the sprawling shade.
Under each tree, a stillness
of small pleasures:
a boy, half in sunlight,
naps with his dog;
20 a woman of forty
squints up from her book
to bite into an apple.

It is a day an immigrant
and his family might remember,
25 the husband taking off his shirt
to sit like an Indian
before the hot grill.
He would not in his own language
call it work, to cook
30 the sticks of marinated meat
for his son circling a yarn
of joy around the chosen tree.
A bit of luck has made him generous.
At this moment in his life,
35 with the sun sifting through
the leaves in panes of light,
he can easily say he loves his wife.
She lifts an infant
onto her left shoulder
40 as if the child
were a treasured sack of rice.
He cannot see her happiness,
hidden in a thicket of blanket
and shining hair.
45 On the grass beside their straw mat,
a black umbrella,
blooming like an ancient flower,
betrays their recent arrival.
Suspicious of so much sunshine,
50 they keep expecting rain.