

Mitsu

Jenna Le

At my first job, an office assistant
named Mitsu, a woman draped
loosely in dowdy clothes always
brushing the cotton shoulders
of her drab blouse, worked:
I later learned
she had a son in college,
so she must've been middle-aged,
but her face was enamel-
smooth, its appearance of apricot-
glossy youth well-preserved,
so I treated her informally,
with the casual city manners
I saved for folks my own age. Mitsu
had come down in the world,
gossips murmured: in the country
she immigrated from,
she had sat like a well-fluffed chicken
on a nest of wealth
and family prestige, which all got lost
some years ago, after which she wed
a fat rich American
and moved to Boston. Very lucky for her
it worked out that way,
people said. Mitsu spoke
English imperfectly, so I,
who had been born in the U.S.
and spoke English with no flaw,
viewed her with a speck
of condescension in my eye. Within months
of meeting Mitsu, I began to spin

elaborate fantasies
about her in my mind: I pictured
how I would one day be her savior,
I pictured her
being reduced to tears
by a haughty client, an elderly racist
who'd berate her for her foreign
speech and dress, and I pictured
myself sweeping onto the scene, so puffed
with righteous rage
that without fear of consequences
I'd vocally defend
the wailing Mitsu, demand the racist
apologize to her forthwith,
then hug her and console her while she cried.
Each time I saw Mitsu at work, my brain
added new elements
to this heroic daydream
until it was vivid
as something that really happened.
And then one morning, I showed up at the office
and Mitsu wasn't there:
the secretary told me
in a chummy confidential whisper
that, due to some careless act I had committed
and for which Mitsu had been blamed,
the boss had yelled at Mitsu
and she had left the premises
last night softly weeping.

