

# 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.

