

paper doll

by Kathy Ahn

she covered me with down and kissed me good night, tucking in loose ends, whispering prayers...

she cut me out of paper and blew me into life. she held the scissors near my neck in case i put up a fight. she covered me in clothes cut out of colored paper: polka dotted skirts, yellow blouses with puffy sleeves. in the 80's i wore paper shoulder pads beneath all my jackets and leggings you could almost see my crotch through (though paper girl that i was, i had no camel toe). in the 90's she cut me clothes only in black paper, made my hair long and straight. boots in black, green, and brown. i asked for oxblood, but she refused.

for play she cut me pale green scrubs, a stethoscope around my neck. i wasn't a nurse; i held a surgeon's scalpel in my hands - cut neatly and painstakingly out of white and grey paper. sometimes i wore black robes, a tiny hammer in my hands pounding on a brown desk, a courtroom backdrop. sometimes i sat in a desk in some hidden room in a paper replica of the white house, including a tiny white and brown dog running around the lawn. i wrote copious amounts of notes on small college ruled paper. i earned massive amounts of money, piled into a paper bank. i drove a fast car - sometimes red, sometimes black, once in a while yellow like the sun.

i woke up one morning and she forgot to put the scissors to my neck. she'd forgotten her fear that i might fight, but she still gripped my hand tight. i tore my hand off and ran - as fast as my paper legs could take me. the paper lace on my paper panties tore off, chafed my inner thighs. i got out onto the street tearing off my panties and my night shirt with my one hand as i ran. i tore off chunks of my long, black hair til it was shorn uneven on top of my head. i covered myself in grass, made a new, bigger thumb out of bark, and hitched a ride to another town, another place, another world, another me...i cut a new me out of paper, and burned the old me down. i mailed her

the ashes in a paper envelope - flesh colored and red speckled - with
a lipstick kiss. i knew she'd want me back.

