

## Head Up : Mouth Open

### **Keep your head down. Do as you are told.**

As the child of Vietnamese refugees, I spent my adolescence trying to emulate the patriotism that my parents had. *Go along with the white man's laws*, they told me, *for the white man saved us from poverty. They welcomed us with open arms when we first came here and gave us the privileges of U.S. soil. So, even if the white man forgets us... even if the white man shrinks us down to objects and leaves us to the dust, we must love this country like no other.*

*That's simply a price we must pay for salvation.*

### **Keep your head down. Do as you are told.**

I stare down at my feet, clenching my fists. The man's no younger than thirty. I bite my lip, mustering a shaky smile onto my lips. He tells me that I am beautiful. Exotic. He says he likes Asian women because they are quiet. I am not yet a woman, a lonely child at the mere age of fourteen. Anger surges through me as he continues whistling his catcalls, oblivious to the discomfort that plagues my body. I want to tell him that I am not quiet. I am undeniably loud, a force to be reckoned with. There will be a day where the world will know my name.

But for now, I just cross the sidewalk quickly when the light pops up. I hear him driving away, left with the harmful stereotypes and labels that I couldn't and didn't change.

### **Keep your head down. Do as you are told.**

No. I will not. I am done with proving my allegiance to this country. I am done with having to quantify the benefits of Asian American representation in government. I am done with being silent, of keeping my head down and doing as I am told.

Let it be known. Let it be heard. I am an American citizen. I am protected under the same constitution and Bill of Rights like everyone else. I pay homage to America's acceptance of my parents by freely executing the freedoms given to me at birth. My right to freedom of speech allows me to speak out against harmful stereotypes and blatant racism fostered by past American policies and propaganda. It doesn't make me any less of a person. It does not make me ignorant of the privileges my parents did not have back in Vietnam.

Thus, is it egregious to ask for Asian American representation in government? Like everyone else, Asian Americans are citizens whose interest should be kept in mind as politicians enact legislation that significantly impacts us. In a society where significant portions of Asian minority groups are underrepresented, such as South East Asians, it's crucial to make sure that we are heard.

Even if it's uncomfortable.

Even if it goes against societal expectations.

Even if it's safer to stay silent.