



Voices
from the
Gaps **Vg**

Evelyn Lau

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She has put her fist through the window of her apartment. As she pulls her arm back, along with half the window, the shards slice across her wrist and the palm of her hand, simple as a knife slicing through uncooked white chicken meat. The blood begins to fill the gash to the brim, spilling over as she looks down at her hand with detachment. The sound of glass falling fills her ears with wind chimes, the sound of glass spinning in the blue night. Ballerinas of glass cling to her wrist; she plucks them out, lets them fall to the floor. She walks to the bathroom and holds the cut hand under the tap, filling the sink with diluted blood. She smiles to herself - she always smiles when she feels broken and ground-up, with nothing left except a diamond in her chest. A diamond that nobody can pluck out and possess. A diamond beautiful like herself. She knows she is beautiful, because the sure, sharp mirror tells her so. I see someone in the mirror, though, who is not beautiful, and that is why she hates me. I am the part of her she wants to kill. She has tried before, but what she doesn't know is that if it wasn't for me she would have died long ago. I won't let her die; even if she doesn't like me, I won't. Maybe that is why she hates me so much. I'm the one who holds her together, and how can I help it if I see bloodshot eyes and the pores of her skin when she bends over the mirror?

— Glass: Fresh Girls & Other Stories



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1971
- * Chinese-Canadian memoirist, poet, and novelist
- * Her memoir, *Runaway*, was made into a television movie

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Evelyn Lau

Biography continued

Evelyn Yee-Fun Lau was born in Vancouver on July 2, 1971 to Chinese immigrants. Her parents were obsessively ambitious on behalf of their children (Lau has one younger sister), demanding constant top performance at school and expecting their eldest daughter, Evelyn, to become a medical doctor. When she reached the age of 10 things got even worse as her father became unemployed and withdrew into emotional passivity - “. . . one of the most traumatic events in my childhood,” Lau later recalled. She had been closely attached to her father, her source of protection from her neurotic mother.

Writing was her means of psychological survival. Lau claims to have been conscious of her urge to become a writer since she was six. In 1983 (age 12) she began publishing poems and short stories in “little magazines.”

Early in 1986 she ran away from her unbearable existence as a social outcast in school and as a suppressed, unloved daughter at home. She became a drug abuser and prostitute in Vancouver - living mostly at social institutions and chronicling in her diary her psychologically battered life and her struggle as an emerging writer. The manuscript became a bestseller when it was published in 1989 under the title *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*.

Generally considered a “one shot” literary success, Lau nevertheless went on publishing two volumes of significant poetry: *You Are Not Who You Claim* (1990) and *Oedipal Dreams* (1992). Many of the poems are lightly edited versions of material previously published in magazines. They take up major themes of *Runaway*: prostitution and the search for a loving, caring father figure.

A collection of 10 short stories, *Fresh Girls & Other Stories* (1993) established her as one of Canada’s leading writers. It is her finest book so far, offering a haunting insight into the minds of young prostitutes and marginalized women, a theme also pursued by the volume of poetry entitled *In the House of Slaves* from 1994.

Also in 1994, *Runaway* was made into a 97 minute television movie entitled *The Diary of Evelyn Lau*. The film is an abbreviated version of the book but stays faithful to its tone and spirit.



Evelyn Lau

Biography continued

In 1995 Lau's first novel *Other Women* appeared, telling the story of a young woman's erotic obsession with an older, married man. Differing in content from the earlier works, it still bears the soul-mark of Evelyn Lau's writing: poignancy and a sense of deep emotional disorientation, at once subtle and nightmarish. Is she an "Asian-American writer?" In principle yes, but it seldom shows in her texts. Lau's prose and poetry have a "nowhere place" and "no direction home" feel about them that may derive from her uprooted and dysfunctional family background but which primarily signify a basic condition of the modern mind.



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Evelyn Lau

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