

# Argus 2019.

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## Art.

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## cookout

Last night I kissed a stranger (no  
lips, no tongue) just

rows and rows of  
rolling yellowing

teeth, sweet breath  
yielding kernel by kernel

in mine.

Last night I kissed a stranger  
and we kissed all night

till our gums touched,  
till there was nothing left

but cob.

— Serena Deng



## red emperor, dressed in syrup

Tanghulu is as sweet as each pearl that drops onto my tongue and coats my teeth, wrapping up the American man I was with and deporting him urgently. When I order, it's bingtanghulu if I'm feeling smart, mountain hawthorne when I'm translating, and Chinese haw/hawberry/hawthorn when I see my ah ma because she likes to hear the crisp snap of the words just like she likes to snap the bills against my father's drunken cheek. Tanghulu holds me to the hard candied parts of ancient palaces, their red on my sticky fingers as I twirl in a qipao my ah ma never brought overseas, twirling till I spit up crystallized bits of honey because ah ma is too busy glaring over the mahjong tile to notice her husband's second deportation or her daughter's first heartbreak. Heartbreak was standing feeling sick over the freeway, testing each couples' lock on the fence as headlights flit across my face, wondering why my father's car was stopped when none of theirs ever were, and realizing I would never see the little stream ah ma said she once cried into because she had to leave the village boy she met working on the field. Fields of cinnamon and nutmeg and cyanide in apple seeds were shrunk and shoved down the chute of my throat until a heated weight pressed against my lower abdomen, the red searing me so much in my young-girl fashion that I craved for nothing more than to feel those sticky honey globes between my fingers again, to pull each seed off the wooden skewer and to spin in a web of syrup until I could see my father again—that tanned buck-ass little boy who once ran barefoot down the street, screaming that he'd move into the palace if his ah ma didn't buy him tanghulu

— Cindy Kuang





## story

we lost ourselves in the story. it was 4am and you were rolling on the floor laughing. there was nothing particularly funny about the story. it was all so sad and so real.

we sat on the floor and my arm dangled. you mentioned the weirdest conspiracy theory. it was probably true. we kissed. we almost kissed. the story was all-encompassing, we no longer knew what was real or not. it was beautiful in the darkness. we wished identical wishes. "i think i'm going to go to sleep," sang your whispers, and i stayed awake, listening until i heard the morning.

— Cerulean Ozarow

## donna

they say women like her are a dime a dozen  
cheaper than the eggs she carries  
too soft in the wrong places, hands  
too rough for a man to hold.  
they call her big words with sharp letters  
promiscuous, prostitute, pitiful  
she only understands one of them  
but one is enough.  
some say she carries two hearts  
one for her mother, one for her son;

her own is beating six feet underground  
awaiting their next family reunion.  
others laugh and say her chest is so plastic  
she'd take millennia to decompose  
and by then she will be long forgotten

— Jade Meyer

## and i don't know what to do

today's the fourth day in a row that i've come home to you on the sofa, unmoving and eyes glued to the carpet. today's the fourth day in a row that i've come home only to hear that you're feeling worse. today's the fourth day in a row that i've gone to bed with a heavy chest.

i whisper to myself that things will get better as i walk myself out the apartment door, as i write my to-do list on the calendar, and as i fall asleep to the sound of you trying to catch your breath. i tell myself not to feel guilty -- that it isn't my fault that i can smile while your very laugh is shattering into lost, indiscernible pieces that might never be found again.

tonight you're crying again. i'm standing in the doorway as you sit on the bed and i'm asking what there is that i can do to help but you can't hear me screaming that i love you and it's all too much and all too loud and all too quiet and we're both so lost.

mine aren't the arms you run into and i'm not the one that you allow to dry your tears that stain your fine-china cheeks. i know that when i hold you and kiss the top of your head it helps but not enough.

and i don't know what to do.

i'm drowning even though i know how to swim. i can see you reaching out to me like i'm a lifeboat but all i really am is drift wood and if you cling too tight i just might break.

tonight i found you crying in the bathroom and i swore to you that i'll never leave. i'll never give up. i'll never let you disappear.

you tell me you're scared and trust me i am too but we're not alone and yet somehow that's not enough for you. i want to tell you that i'm strong enough to handle anything and that you *just have to trust me*.

but what if i'm  
not?

today i came home and you weren't on the sofa. you're laying down on your newly made bed, staring at your phone and pretending that you don't know that i can see that you're worse. today's the fifth day in a row that i heard you burst into tears and it broke my heart just a little bit more. today's the fifth day in a row that i'm lost.

and i still don't know what to do.

— Olenka Miller



# An Anthology of Foods

## *How to Make a Mustard Sandwich*

Grab a slice of bread  
In the palm of your  
Hand. White, Wheat,  
Multi-grain. Pick up the silver  
Butter knife from your drawer  
Put it in your left hand  
Grab a bottle of yellow  
Mustard in your right  
Squirt condiment on bread  
Smear condiment on bread  
Place bread on bread  
Take a bite of the sandwich  
Starting from the crease  
Throw away the sandwich

## *How to Eat a Chocolate Sandwich Cookie*

Go to Sings delicatessen  
Be hungry. Grab a metallic package  
Of Blue for a Green  
Look within the monochromatic  
Abyss of mass packaging  
With a five pronged fork  
Remove a three pronged disk  
Deprong the disk and consume  
Until there is only Black  
And then Nothing  
The Life of a Wafer  
Once upon a time  
There was a wafer  
But now there is only a crumb  
I cry.  
I can't believe it's not Food!  
Sometimes I chew  
On dental floss  
The minty bursts  
Like gum  
Are short lived  
And then there is only  
Dental floss  
Which I spit out  
My tongue is sensitive  
From the sharp floss  
I clean it with water  
From the toilet  
And dry my tongue  
With a single ply

## *Lunchtime*

I leave 4th period  
And walk to the Café  
Where demons yell  
And I leave  
To the vending machine  
Which doesn't accept  
Lincoln or me  
I walk up the stairs  
To my left or the right  
And enter the library  
But I cannot eat here  
And so I leave  
And walk to the foyer  
To sell my soul  
For Lincoln to demons  
For garbage  
As I sit  
Surrounded by Garbage  
With Garbage  
Near Garbage  
As Garbage  
And then I walk  
Back to the library  
And sit in a chair  
And do some homework  
And don't do some homework  
And then I wait  
Until it is 5th period  
And then I leave  
And try to find Argus  
And I don't find Argus  
And so I leave  
And go to the library  
And wait

Until it is 6th period  
And go to class

— Scott Klein

## Bone Marrow

Thirty minutes too long, so the broth over the low flame  
is skipping, like stones or a heart. Poured into bowls  
which we receive in cupped hands. Bite down on the bones, mom says.  
A call from her long-ago home. We find out her father is ill,  
he is forgetting more than he used to, he is forgetting us.  
So we bite down. The bones crack in two, molars into marrow,  
red and gritty. Stuck in my throat. The fat of the marrow is the best part,  
hidden in the bones' holes and dimples. Drink it, mom says.  
We are waiting forever by the phone. I cry before she does,  
my head pressed heavy on her shoulder. No one has ever taught me  
how to miss someone I never really knew. So I just listen, I slurp it up.  
If I don't try to taste it, it tastes like nothing at all. The rest of the marrow  
dissolving in ceremony, splitting into stock and steam. Turned to nothing,  
dying again even in death. Spooned into our mouths, so we don't talk.

— Claire Shang



## Nesting Dolls

Down is my favorite way to travel. To let a force some call gravity  
but I know is relief carry me towards the center of the earth.  
I wonder if the dinosaurs ever found their way there,  
if there is someone waiting for me wedged  
between the mantle and the core. Magma bubbles up in my throat,  
pushing against tissue to allow itself to spill over.  
Teach me something about resisting. When I was twelve,  
my grandmother pressed a plastic crimson figurine  
hidden within ten more into hesitant hands and told me to wait for something  
good. The layers sit open-faced on my windowsill,  
separated from each other a long time ago. I fold myself  
small enough to step inside the lower half of one and pull the head over mine.  
The matron, the crust, everything skin deep. She sits at head of the line,  
cheeks painted scarlet, eyes painted open, mouth painted shut.  
Maybe she is patient enough for something  
good.

— Charlotte Newman



## missed connections

i.

Saw you on the F train. Reading poetry to yourself, lips moving softly. I'm not a reader, but I Googled "Leaves of Grass" as soon as I got home.

ii.

Cute barista at Starbucks on 96th and Lex with a Gryffindor pin on her shirt. I'm a Slytherin, but I'm sure we can make it work.

iii.

We bumped shoulders in front of Macy's. You said "Sorry," and I would've said something back but I was too busy looking into your eyes for something I swear I saw. Did you see it too?

vi.

Your fruit cart was on the corner of my block for the past fifteen years. I used to buy a banana from you every morning. I don't even like bananas.

v.

To the guy who dumped a whole bouquet of roses in the trash on 32nd and 5th: she didn't deserve you.

vi.

I asked to pet your dog the other day on 82nd and Broadway. Cute dog, but I really wanted to talk to you. I was too embarrassed to meet your gaze, but you have a lovely voice.

vii.

I drove you in a yellow cab to the Met last Saturday. When you handed me the fare, our fingers brushed. You told me to keep the change.

viii.

You were a stranger. I think I was drunk. I don't normally do things like that. It might have been a dare. You're a good kisser.

ix.

You caught me ducking under the turnstyle to catch the B train on time. Thanks for not saying anything to that MTA officer.

x.

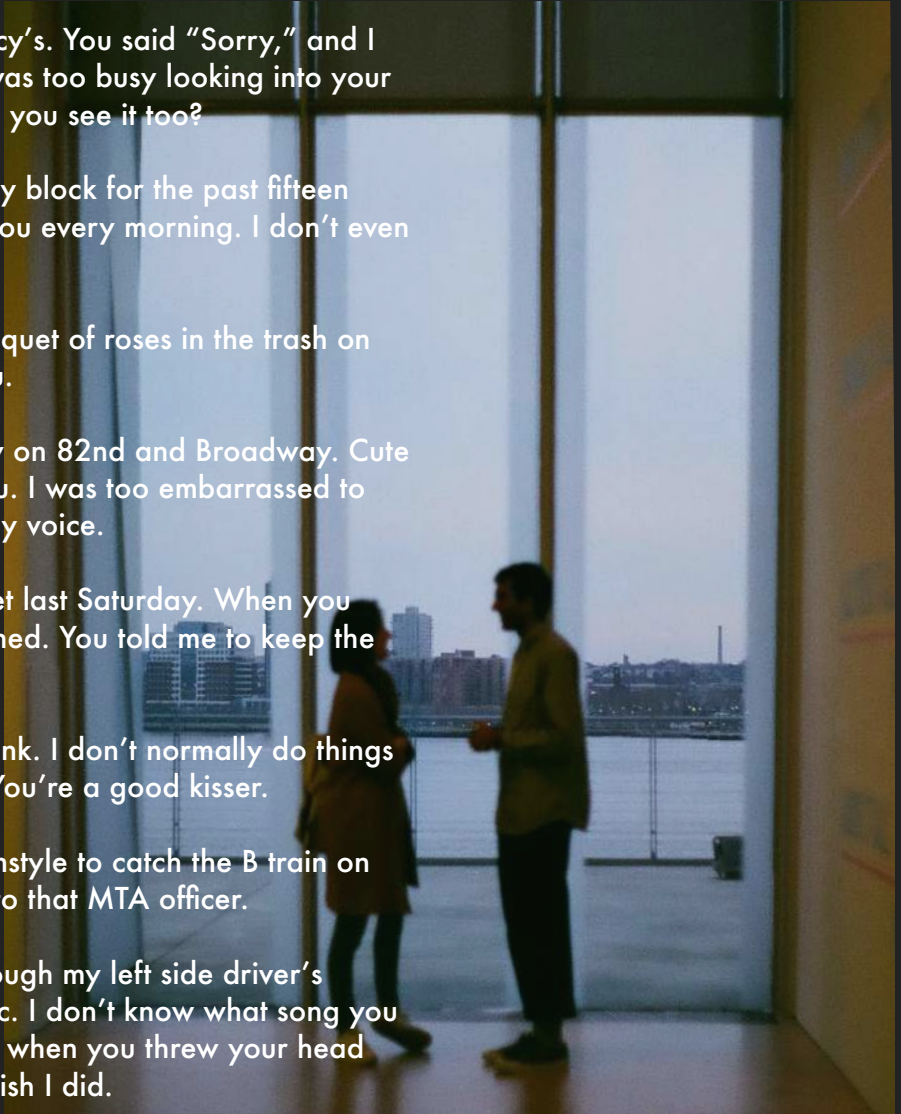
I saw you on 79th and Riverside, through my left side driver's window when we were sitting in traffic. I don't know what song you were singing, but the joy in your face when you threw your head back to hit that high note made me wish I did.

xi.

You kissed me - my first kiss - at the middle school dance. When I saw you for the first time since then, yesterday morning at the Columbus Ave. bus stop, I felt like I was back in seventh grade.

xii.

I didn't know you. You didn't know me. But you tapped me on the shoulder and said "Look," so I wouldn't miss the sunset blazing down the skyline. Thank you for reminding me to open my eyes.



— Sylvi Stein

## Goodbye to a World

She holds my hand and steps over the remains of a broken ATM machine. Bills spill over the pavement like guts.

"Hey look," Molly says. "The church is on fire."

I look. Sure enough, the Ellis Wood Second Presbyterian Church is lit up. The steeple, once asylum-wall white, is now smoldering black, smoke curling up the sides of the weathervane like ascending angels.

"Who set the church on fire?" I ask.

"Dunno," she says. "Some kids, probably. I hope they're not coming back to torch us. I'd like another fifteen minutes."

No one's coming. Everyone is in their houses, holding each other and waiting.

On the first day of tenth grade, Molly Farber turned to me in English, a few minutes before the bell was going to signal the start of class.

"I've never had a class with you before," she said.

"Yeah," I said. I could hear her over the Arcade Fire pumping in my ears, but I pulled out my earbuds anyway.

"I'm Molly," she said.

"I'm Jake," I said.

"I like your ass," she said.

I blinked at her. "Me too."

She nodded her head, tapped her fingers idly on the desk, and then said, "You're supposed to say something about my ass now."

I think I turned red. "I can't see it," I said. I looked at my neighboring classmates to see if they were catching any of this, but they were all engrossed in their phones.

She stood up from her desk and came to stand directly in front of mine. Then she turned around.

She had her hair in two ponytails. She was wearing a baby-pink dress that puffed outwards at the bottom. She stood stock still, not bent over at all. "What do you think?" she said.

"I think class is starting," I said.

After that we were sort of friends.

"Fuck," Molly says. We're looking down Main Street. One month ago, this street looked like it was right out of a Thomas Kincaid painting — adorable little shops hunched by the road, each presenting their goods on decorative tissue paper in the window displays. At the start of summer someone had twisted fake flower garlands around the street-lamps, and no one had taken them down at the start of fall. Now the garlands lie in the middle of the street, waiting to be run over by cars that aren't coming. The sky, beginning to turn blister red, distorts the colors of the garland-flowers — purple turns to green, white to yellow, blue to brown. There's broken glass everywhere from the shop windows. The younger kids from our high school trashed them yesterday. But they didn't take anything except the beer and vodka from the liquor store. There was no point.

I turn to Molly. Her skin, like the flowers, is turning strange shades in the light.

"You look like an Oompa Loompa," I tell her.

"So do you," she says. She looks at Main Street. "I don't get why I applied to college," she says. "Still, though, I really wish we could have graduated."

The first time I heard about the destructive power of asteroids was when I was in Biology in eleventh grade. Molly was also in that class. She and Jojo sat at the lab table in front of me and Connor.

The teacher, Mr. Richards, was talking about how an asteroid had killed the dinosaurs. He was describing the moment just before impact: "It would have been bright, quite bright, and then slowly everything would have gone dark as dust clouds obscured the light from the sun."

Molly raised her hand. "Mr. Richards, what if an asteroid were to hit Earth today?"

Mr. Richards smiled and leaned back against the blackboard. "We don't have to worry about that, thankfully. NASA could tell if one was coming and they've developed safeguards against it. They could hit it with bombs and destroy it, or use large magnets to change its course."

"I don't believe that," Molly said. The entire class turned to look at the girl who had contradicted the teacher.

"There's no way that'd be enough. We'd be so screwed."

"Don't use that expression in my class, please," Mr. Richards said.

"This is making me depressed," Molly says.

"Is it?" I say sarcastically.

Molly picks up a piece of glass from the street and rubs it against her palm without cutting herself. "Let's go somewhere and watch it," she says. "I want to watch it."

I gently take the piece of glass from her hand, replace it with my own, and then, with my other hand, I throw the piece of glass as far as I can down Main Street. "Where do you want to go?" I ask, gripping her fingers tightly.



piece of glass as far as I can down Main Street. "Where do you want to go?" I ask, gripping her fingers tightly.

"Let's go somewhere teenager-y," she says. "Somewhere like a music video."

"We could go to the movie theater," I say, pointing to where it sits down the street. Yesterday the kids rearranged the marquis. "F UCK YOUR MOT HER" it reads, and then beneath that, in smaller letters, "STARRING BRADLEY COOPER."

"Didn't you hear me?" she says. "Jake, I want to see it."

"Yeah, okay," I say.

"I have an idea," she says. "Let's go to the cemetery."

One month ago, I woke up to the sound of stones being thrown at my window. I opened it. It was Molly. The stones weren't stones; they were pieces of Hubba Bubba. Molly was standing next to her pink bicycle in my yard. My bedroom was on the second floor, and when I leaned out of my window I was only about five feet above her.

"What is it?" I said. "You woke me up."

"It's only eight-thirty," she said through a mouthful of bubblegum. "Why were you sleeping?"

I shrugged. "I was finishing up the Common App. It was boring. I fell asleep. What's so important?"

She blew a bubble. It popped and a thin layer spread all over her lips. She pushed her tongue through so she could say, "Oh, nothing much. Only it's just the world is ending."

"What?"

"An asteroid is speeding toward Earth right now. It's gonna hit North America, and then destroy the entire world via mega-tsunamis and other natural disasters. There's nothing NASA can do. We're all gonna die."

"This isn't funny, Molly."

"Check the news, you dick," she said, blowing another bubble.

I went downstairs and observed my parents sitting on the couch, gaping open-mouthed at the television. They didn't even notice me come in, which was not at all unusual. All I had to see was a large rock surrounded by fire in the corner of the screen before I ran back upstairs.

I leaned out the window. Molly was still there. "Heck," I said.

"Yeah," she said.

"Do I have to finish the Common App?" I asked.

She didn't answer. She got back on her bicycle but she didn't ride away. She just stayed there, one foot on a pedal, bubblegum all over her mouth. She kind of looked like a child, but she was gazing at the star-dotted evening sky and there was nothing childish about her expression.

Together we lie down on the grass between the grave of an old person and the grave of another old person and we stare up at the clouds. They look bloody. Even though it's early December, it's starting to get hot. Like really hot. I take off my shirt, glancing at Molly. She isn't looking at me. I'm still sweating, even with the shirt off.

"I should be with my parents," Molly says. "They were crying in their bed when I left."

"My parents don't care where I am," I say. "They're crying, too, I think."

I can make out an outline now. It starts at the horizon and ends somewhere behind the trees at the back of the cemetery. I have to sit up and crane my neck to see it. I haven't felt anything—haven't allowed myself to feel anything—before this moment, but suddenly there's a pulse racing through my body, absolutely everywhere. I can't control my breathing. I feel like I've just finished running one million pacer tests in a row.

I look down at Molly and she's looking up at me, at all of me.

"I wish we'd had sex," she says. "I liked you a lot. I thought you were cute. Didn't you like me?"

"Yeah. I did."

"Why didn't you make a play for me then?"

"Why didn't you make a play for me?" I ask.

"I thought maybe you didn't like me."

I sigh. "I was too shy to ask you out."

She's crying now. Her tears are like rose petals kissing her orange face. My body casts a black shadow over her. My back feels sunburned.

"I don't want to die a virgin," Molly says. "Do you want to have sex like right now?"

I nod. I take off my jeans, and as they come off they rub against my legs and my skin seethes with the heat. I pull down my underwear. Molly pulls off her dress and then her black and white polkadot bra. I've imagined her like this before, but never with scarlet skin. She pulls down her underwear and her hair is stark black in the light of the fire above us.

I fall against her but we can't move. Everywhere we touch is cool, everywhere else is burning. We lie there. I feel her chest fluttering beneath mine. I press my face into her neck. I don't want to see it hit.

"You know," Molly says, "I really like this world."

— Maude Lechner

## Cars!

When I was in the second grade  
My mom's car got in a small accident  
A baby blue baby minivan  
Turning right but just a bit too close  
To another baby car.  
The two cars bickered at each other very briefly -  
Then they sat there. Other cars waddle around, the two cars in awkward equilibrium of not knowing what to say but knowing they had to stay there.  
I did not know what to do  
But I knew that car crashes were very bad.  
I began to cry despite not having  
Even a scratch on a finger.  
Soon, my father, deeply knowledgeable about car crashes,  
Galloped in with his white Chevy and  
Brought me away.  
Here we are,  
Having just thrown rocks at each other's windows.  
There is nothing left to say  
Except me not wanting you to go and you knowing that I don't want you to leave  
I do not know what to do.  
But I know that this is very bad  
But I am also older now and know that you hate seeing me cry  
You hate that you could be keying my walls without even touching me  
But I can't. Each sob carries another sob choking the other's neck  
and everytime I look at you  
looking down  
You are bored. you are untouched.  
But I am bleeding profusely and about to fall off.  
I stroke my finger on your hand just like we used to  
Hoping to feel one last time that you are with me  
Wondering if any cell of warmth is still holding me tight  
But it's too late  
You are already gone  
You have galloped away  
And I am still here.  
I sit here on this park bench  
Watching a quiet empty street on fifth avenue,  
A place that is never silent,  
Waiting for you to come back,  
Waiting for some car, any car to crash,  
Anything to touch me and leave some  
Mark that you are there.

— Samuel Ahn

## isabella's homework

we may have drafted our summer rhapsody too early  
running down the block in wide-legged pants,  
we hid so well we forgot to do our homework,  
you stuck roses in my pocket, made me fall in love  
with the doves in the sky, made me split them open  
into poems raining down on us like blessings  
you smiled and said thank you, for saving you a chair  
in the kitchen, a turkey hat in November, a spot to splash  
barefoot on rusty grates, thanked me for open fields,  
unearthed lilies, for finding the other half of the equation but now,  
now you're a woman, sitting tipsy on the stool  
cashing in your night hooks, red licorice on your wrists  
folding one leg over the other, crying so hard you laugh  
when men touch you in the bathroom, seeing your face reflected  
like a moon off the porcelain, wondering what would've changed  
if many years ago, I had told you:

thank you for signing your name  
small and tidy in the corner

— Cindy Kuang

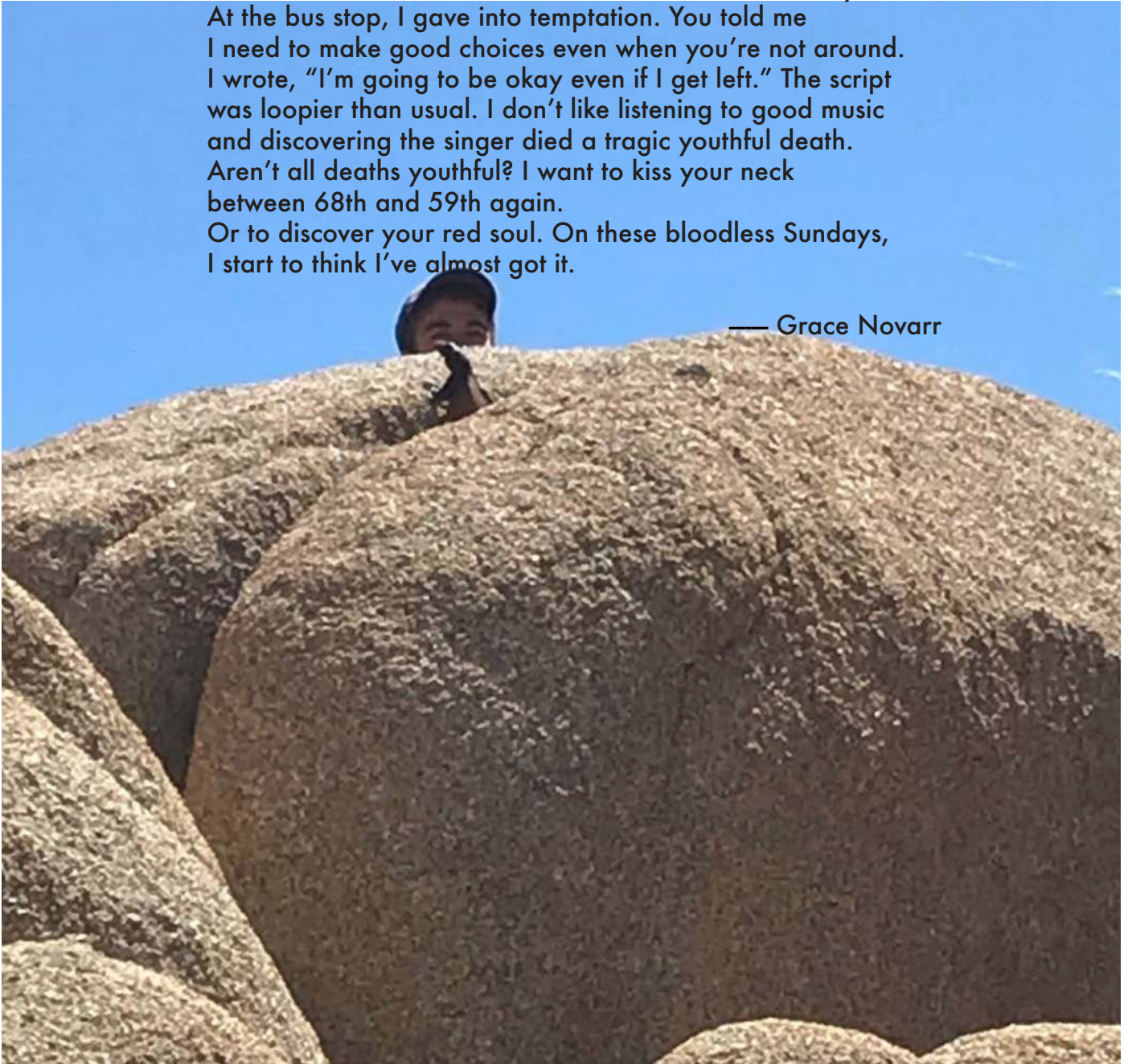


## October Poem

The truth: I missed you this weekend. I discovered a red soul  
somewhere inside me. I was lost in the woods  
in some disingenuous suburbia we made in the Bronx.  
I was getting sick of horoscopes. On your couch  
we were disappointed to learn that our favorite cooking show  
had become scripted and plastic. Three men winked  
at me on the subway. I like when trains go aboveground.  
The light is my favorite color. I hate the book I'm reading.  
I need you so much. I danced to a song  
that I think about in terms of us. Except that it's unromantic.  
But I think romance is overrated. I think this simple humanity  
that we cultivate in each other's arms is more necessary.

At the bus stop, I gave into temptation. You told me  
I need to make good choices even when you're not around.  
I wrote, "I'm going to be okay even if I get left." The script  
was loopier than usual. I don't like listening to good music  
and discovering the singer died a tragic youthful death.  
Aren't all deaths youthful? I want to kiss your neck  
between 68th and 59th again.  
Or to discover your red soul. On these bloodless Sundays,  
I start to think I've almost got it.

— Grace Novarr





## To Wash

You step into the shower, turning the hot water knob until it won't budge anymore. After the moment of adjustment, which you spend watching your body steam, you let yourself close your eyes. You're careful not to relax too much, or else you would fall over and crack your head

open. Start by washing your hair, using purple stuff with Moroccan oil that smells vaguely like old lavender. It feels so good to claw through your scalp, to rinse away the sweat and grease. Combing through your matted locks, you feel beautiful. Water dances down your forehead, slipping through your eyelashes, between your lips. You lift your head up, allowing the water to fall faster and heavier down your stomach. Run your hands over your hips and waist and you marvel at how much you like the feel of your curves. Slick with water, you love the way you look as a shadow on the white tiles. The only mirror to remind you that you are more than cloudy

thoughts is the pool of water on the silvery showerhead. Your reflection in these droplets looks like magic or an impressionist painting. You might be the only one awake for miles, but you wouldn't know. You are blissfully captured in a fantasy of confidence and hot water. As you start scrubbing your skin, you wonder why you don't always feel like this. You scrape your arms and thighs with a rough washcloth harder than you meant to. Before you can think too much, you reach out and close the water stream. Just stand for a moment and let the water drip from your hair to the lower curve in your back to your ankles.

You wrap yourself in a large towel and, now that you are outside the shower, you catch a glimpse of yourself in the fluorescent-lighted bathroom mirror above the sink. Your skin is thoroughly red and raw from vicious scrubbing and you feel simple, plain and natural in a most unappealing way. Your fantasy has left you and now you start to feel a beetle of anxiety wiggle its way into your lower stomach. It seems to have climbed from the mirror down to the damp-floor and then up through your intestines. A shaky deep breath to knock out the bug for a little bit, and you start to dry yourself off. Frizzy, soft hairs begin curling up, in the corner of your vision. Plug in the hair iron and finish clothing your body, covering the parts you don't like and leaving the rest for show. You yank on each strand of your hair, working from the barely reachable back of your head to the shorter strands in the front. The humid hairs resist your efforts, springing up after each pull. You hear the sizzle of the iron touching wet hair and feel the heat on your ear and on your cheeks. You think about how easy it would be to press the iron right onto your eyelid. Would it swell? Would you cry? Maybe. Right now you should be crying about robbing the curvature from your hair, but you aren't. You are making yourself easier to look at.

That night you end up on the brown corduroy couch of your childhood friend, sitting next to a boy who smells like cigarettes and sophisticated cologne. You thought he looked like a movie star with his fine, blond hair falling over his ears and his smirk forming between accented words. He speaks aggressively, but once he comes to sit next to you, his voice softens to a whisper. His words come so close, you feel his curly hair on your straightened hair and you feel the heat of his breath on your ear, already sensitive from the heat of the iron. You talk for a bit. You wonder if he will fall in love with your red stained lips. You wonder if your time with him will end in a tender embrace and a promise to see each other again. You wonder if he would still be murmuring in your ear if your mane were wild and knotty. He comes in so close that you

inspect the color of his eyelashes and watch the way his lips move around his words. Then, you are kissing this boy. You feel the beetle in your stomach expand into a fiery ball of warmth. Your story with him ends with a rough, intrusive hug and two stubbly pecks on your cheek.

He was reasonably aggressive, but nothing compared to past kisses. There was the boy on the beach, whose mouth was rigid and his hands firm around your body, trapping you in his arms. He traveled up your dress and when you pushed his hands away, he pulled you in closer. And the kiss before that, in a dark room, where a different boy pleaded with you to kiss him. You convinced yourself that you wanted to and that you weren't bothered by the way he grazed your thigh and looked at you as if you were a piece of meat to devour. Remembering these kisses you feel your stomach plummet when you see yourself as the object you let yourself become, but you can't help but love the sheer violence of it all. And of course you do. You train each hair on your head to be yanked before being acceptable.

You often imagine being kissed in the shower. Cornering the droplets of hot water and steam between your upper lip and his lower one. His eyes wander your body, treasuring you and asking to touch. You can tell from the way he breaths nervously that he wants to run his fingers through your wet curls, tangle them even further. His thumb caresses your eyelids, making them feel hot. You could cry when you think about this, because it feels as real as the goddess you see in the underbelly of the silver faucet. You hope that one day you can shower, turn the faucet knobs (stopping the fantasies that pour out, along with water) and really see your reflection in the fluorescent bathroom mirror above the sink. You're red and raw from the steaming water. You look simple, plain, and beautiful.

— Juliette Carbonnier



## Corporate Round Table

I walked into the polished board room expecting change.  
The door locked, I sat across BP and Coca Cola and GM and prepared to talk.

Off the bat—

Coca Cola tells me, “don’t be afraid”—  
He tells me, don’t be afraid about how the workers get paid  
or how the sausage gets made,  
Just let the bubbles that hurt so good roll off my tongue  
And flow through my veins. And I do.

But the can’s already been shaken,  
taken across the world, swollen, rattled, crashing  
down among the waves in Puerto Rico and kicked  
to the curb by student protestors,

that when I pull the pin,  
the volcano erupts, a violent pop of pressurized carbon dioxide and methane covering everything in sight.

Coca Cola admitted in March that it produces three million tonnes  
of plastic packaging every year.  
BP spends fifty-three million dollars annually lobbying to  
stop climate change legislation.

(break)

It is then that I realize that I have no seat at the table.  
That I am invisible.  
That company men have no business making this earth hospitable,  
or making the water more drinkable or making life more livable—

Despicable, criminal .... predictable

but goddamn is this room nice!  
But goddamn is this carpet soft and this table shiny and granite and this chair (gasp) —

Is this Italian leather?!?  
Is this hellish weather?  
Is this Earth and me dying together?

Well, it depends.

It’s all about how you package yourself—  
How well you can rebrand yourself,  
twist to form an imperfect mold and  
hide behind a green mask.

The door is locked, and I have no seat at the table.  
Even so, I am what is being bartered,  
traded for a brand new factory here or a new mine there—  
I am what is being affected, when my relatives in Greece have to  
evacuate their homes, just a few miles from  
raging wildfires spurred by  
climate change.

The door is locked, and we have no seat at the table.

In fact, we aren’t even allowed into the room,  
clawing at the wood and peeking through the keyhole.

And while we may never find the key,  
with enough of us,  
we can sure as hell bust the door open.

— Andreas Psahos

## LOVE POEM

You and I are the two least interesting lizards in the Bronx Zoo reptile house, which is saying a lot since the boa constrictor died last summer and now no one visits, except to get someplace else. In our free time we press green-blue noses to fogged up windows. See the world together baby – grizzly reserve to tiger mountain.

We will not last the season, we are star crossed – monogamy among reptiles is unreported, which is a fact we read in the informational pamphlets. Not our fault if I keep leaving you for the red hot heating lamp. The plexiglass isn't weatherproofed and it grows terribly cold at night, and common lizards don't rebel against genetics anyways. We are unremarkable. By all accounts come winter we won't remember us at all.

Unless. Crawl back to the fourth-best rock in the tank and lick your lizard wounds; try and forget how I liked your brown scales, your shiny claws. Keep on shivering. We thought love could warm us up. They said by now this wouldn't hurt so bad and they were wrong.

I know lizards do not shed their skins. I wish we did, I think we could; I hope the next time we skitter into the sunlight your yellow eyes will fixate on me anew. The information center is perplexed. This is not allowed. Lizards tried out love for a time but decided not to bother anymore because it offered no help in fleeing the hawks, and everybody knows that. If the Bronx Zoo has hawks we can't see them from our enclosure.

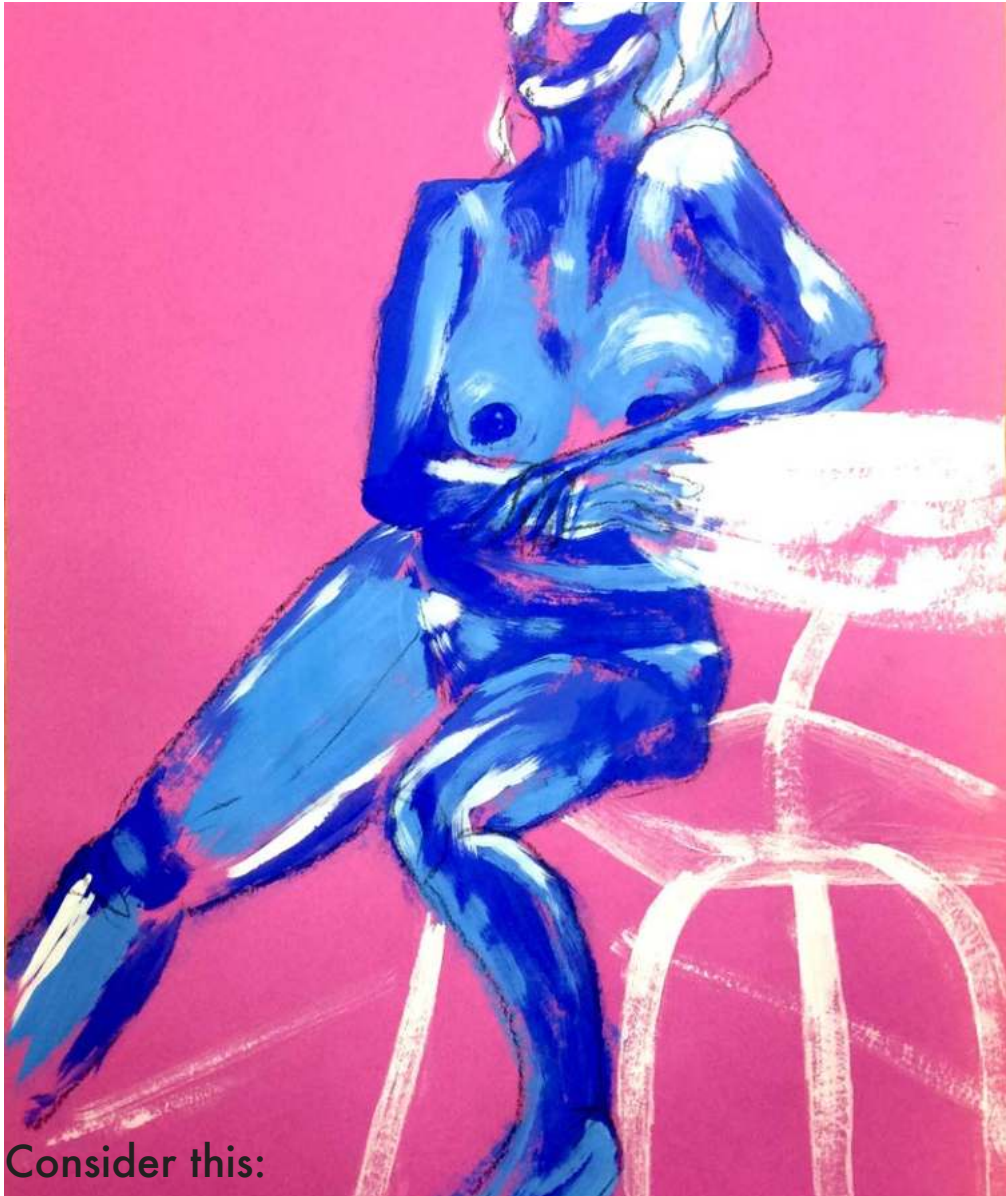
What a horribly practical evolution. Lizard bodies too terrified of the next bird of prey to learn devotion. What to even do with love – eat it like a cricket? Would love chirp?

Maybe we're going about it all wrong. Nothing in our history could prepare us for this. Lizards don't know how to love but it's not like we know how not to either.

It would have been more sensible to be born chameleons, to conceal ourselves, to be snakes and slip out of sad scales like thieves through windows. If you were a gecko at least you'd have a job selling car insurance. If you were a komodo dragon you'd never have let anyone come too close. If you were anything, anything other than what you are. A species that had learned something. A species with a shell. A species with a word for "want." It was cruel of you to say we were cold blooded.

— Audrey Kolker





Consider this:

Theseus's ship,  
but instead of a ship with lots of parts being taken off and replaced,  
it's one solid block of clay.  
Dark red, rectangular, wet  
sitting on a metal plate in the front of the classroom.  
No one's paying attention to a stationary block of clay  
and the teacher's stepped out,  
so I've stepped up,  
and taken the clay in my hands.  
I turn it, over and over,  
feeling its soft flesh give to the motions of my palms,  
stretching my hands apart,  
watching its sinew hang between pieces.  
Everyone's looking now.

— Ashley Zhao

## Coconut

Coconut!

The meaning of the word as I use it is twofold, I think.

First, coconuts are a wonderful way to depict where I am from.

Well, not where I'm from (I'm from Manhattan), but where I'm from, if you understand me.

The question that gets asked when well meaning inquirers want to ask me, "why are you brown?"

Coconuts call to mind palm trees and tropical weather

A dark skinned man with a tightly knotted spine and a big knife chopping one in half so someone with a little more change in their pocket can drink the cool water and enjoy the soft white meat as a reprieve from the oppressive heat and heavy humidity and the dust that wants to settle into my lungs—

do you know where I'm from yet?

Here's another hint, if you'd like me to be more obvious:

Think of bangles, of dancers with bare feet and graceful wrists, think of elephants, weaving between those same coconut trees, flying carpets if you like, and

oh, I don't know,

exotic culture.

You might be surprised, at just how much power that word has, but remember—

not only am I a first generation Indian

my mother is a South Indian immigrant, one whiff

of coconut brings back my grandmother rubbing coconut oil into my hair, coconut in all the chutney, coconut water to cool down.

The second part is the realization that coconut could just as easily be me.

They are brown on the outside, white on the inside,

the risk you have to take moving to a country as known for stealing identity as this one.

coconuts assimilate easily (how quickly has the water become a hipster's staple?)

and so must we, so we swap the rotis for white bread,

salwar for a miniskirt,

We get "henna tattoos" with our newfound white friends and ignore the fact that we know the word is mehendi.

Say goodbye to shah rukh khan, and hello to taylor swift

The only part of a coconut that people want is the soft white inside, so

it always felt like such an easy price to pay- my culture for acceptance.

And they will accept me into their roomful of white friends talking about how uniquely marginalized they are.

So what if I bite my tongue to stop from laughing my too loud

Punjabi laugh?

Coconut, baby, convince yourself it's worth it to let them go and let your past in.

After they've eaten the inside, the tough brown exterior is all that's left.

— Isha Vasudev



## Six Notes Into The Song, The Lead Guitarist Begins To Cry

1.  
You  
are an inconstant and changeable  
rather like some old-world God  
or the way the streetlights fled the shadows  
lay  
  
past my bedtime.  
  
You  
  
across my bedroom ceiling when I  
awake, far
2.  
I don't know how much there is left to say  
my english teacher says there  
no  
truly original sentences left in the whole  
of the English Language  
but I mean at least  
  
are  
  
angst sells.
3.  
Someone took me home last night  
in the interior  
of a taxicab that smelled like cigarette smoke and  
you taste with your tongue  
down my throat -  
?  
  
what  
  
and didn't I say I was asleep
4.  
Fleeting  
is a good word  
for  
google synonyms  
evanescent ephemeral  
short  
  
I
5.  
Self portrait in the mirror:  
abstracted in the condensation I  
a work of art albeit  
that the new yorker will conclude  
falls just short of andy warhol  
and picasso's blue period.  
  
am  
  
some modern gallery
6.  
Brother is icarus  
father is daedalus  
your waist is charybdis  
your eyes are  
medusa  
too cruel to offer me  
death  
orpheus.  
  
not  
  
mother is anticlea  
sister is circe  
your smile is scylla














"All this time, I thought I was alive.  
Turns out: I was just another body  
fitted to your favorite ghost."

— Grace Novarr

"i look through her instagram and  
God the rage just flows through me."

— Amaya Gonzalez

"Sometimes I can't help but think about all the things I would tell you  
if we had all the time in the world and I was no longer scared; no full  
stops just pauses and rests"

— Jenelle Burgess

"I left you behind in that town by the riverbeds  
three months later. Accepted your token of a  
small, smooth blue stone, perfect for skipping."

— Charlotte Newman





"glue is mixing in with your blood and tears like a nightmare clown in opaque lipstick."

— Sophie Askanase

"Salt dissolves in sugar.  
Black tea swaying in an absent-minded hand."

— Roza Nayda

"I was settled, well enough, such that she lamented  
how I never met the fisherman in the market, never saw  
the crabs escape and skitter on the tiles, never  
bartered for cabbage or learned to tell fresh shrimp from stale."

— Cindy Kuang



# Japan Story

in my dreams i am in japan. there is a small village in the corner of somewhere, maybe nowhere. we are in fields and fields and the flowers are blooming. we are here. we are all here. chiyoko and ena and hibiki are here, with their wispy cloud-hair, and shiori, with her little dog. he has a little blue collar and he chases us as we run. aoi and kinata are twins, with matching ebony eyes and dark charcoal lashes. they stand here too. kaito has a limp, and pretty legs. pretty but crooked. in my dreams he tries to run and falls down. he looks down at his pretty white legs and looks sad, for his legs are thin like reeds and he cannot properly stand. i am sorry for him, but when i wake up it is all gone. i wake up and it is cold and windy. the fields are replaced by softly falling snow. my dreams are of japan and they fade away into my pillow.

canada is a barren land. the people here, they are tall with sharp faces and light hair. when they speak their lips are sharp, the words harsh. spindly spider fingers, pale arms with peachy prickly hairs, sharp. they are the beautiful ones in this strange foreign land. they let out harsh cries when they see me and touch my dark dark hair. in this land i am all alone. my almond eyes and my golden skin. i am a yellow rose in the midst of a blizzard.

promise me you won't leave me. yakusoku, i promise. this girl has promised me. she will never go. i tell her in return. i will always stay here, yakusoku, and i never see her. i am gone in the night and i don't say bye to her.

there were houses, i know. dirt houses and small pots over a stove. the rice was so warm. the grains settling in my stomach and everything small and cozy. i don't remember anymore. fields and fields drift into my mind. i don't remember. someone is stumbling and falling down.

drifts of snow settle outside. everyone making snowballs and they are icy bullets in my hands. so round and make me shiver. when the people are throwing them i don't know why. snowflakes are pretty. i hate it when they break all the little crystals and push them into a ball. it feels like a storm. everyone throws them and they hit me with icy bullets in my heart. i don't think anything. i am trembling and on the ground. i am crushed rose in the midst of a blizzard.

hide. under my warm coat. i can see my breath here, the air sharp like icicles. i am huddling underneath the blankets. i thought i was warm once. i don't remember anymore. i thought someone had a dog. everything small and cozy. were there fields anywhere? it is so cold. i stop dreaming and using my pillow.

ebony eyes and charcoal lashes. my hair is dark, skin yellow like summer. the only girl who talks to me has yellow hair like a spring flower. she nods her head like a daffodil in a warm breeze. bright gold-dust curls fall to her shoulders. i finger my straight hair.

where was everyone? i think back then i wasn't so alone. children in small villages. sit here in the middle of nowhere. i am trying to run somewhere i can't remember.

tissues white like roses at a funeral. her hair is bright. i look up and she is watching me. where did she come from? i don't know. she asks me why i'm not indoors. i am so far from home. i follow her. there is a little house and something over a small stove. slowly everything is warm. something cozy settling in my stomach and i thought it was like this in some other world. i don't



promise me you will never leave me, promise me i'll never go. she smiles like a different girl that i used to know. what did i say to her?

snowflakes are like fields of crystal flowers. we are running into the distance. golden hair ahead of me and mine wispy like a cloud. we are laughing. almond eyes bright and everything soft. i am starting to remember. i left in the night. couldn't see in the dark. there is something shining in the distance. i am so warm. i am running to her, smiling at her. what did i say to her? i remember now.

arigato, thank you. snowflakes are like fields of crystal flowers. we are running into the distance. golden hair ahead of me and mine wispy like a cloud. we are laughing. almond eyes bright and everything soft. i am starting to remember. i left in the night. couldn't see in the dark. there is something shining in the distance. i am so warm. i am running to her, smiling at her. what did i say to her? i remember now.

arigato, thank you.

— Grace Yu





## Lemon Chicken

My mother taught me to preserve before I even knew decay. A thin-bladed knife sliced translucent lemons in fluorescent light that shone false and electric through the citrus. I closed my eyes and wished for May. Meyer's are the best for chicken, she said, and I stored the information someplace safe because I needed to know that someday. Cut lemons went in sparkling salt poured into a ring on a milk-white plate. Make sure to coat both sides, and I pressed my finger to the porcelain to see what sour saltiness felt like. (All burnt orange and somebody leaving.) Mouth puckered, thumb stinging where I had gotten a paper cut two days earlier. I layered the lemons in a mason jar, pushing them flat without any room to breathe. Juice coated my hands, pure and sharp and I wondered if it felt the same as the knife. I piled more slices on top, pressing old ones down and seeing how many I could fit before the jar burst, glass crumbling as fine as the salt. It wasn't many, and my mother took all the lemons and salt and poured the juice back out again and showed me how to do it right.

—Charlotte Newman



## confrontation: where are you from?

### TAKE ONE:

please give me a moment, proper nouns  
stutter over the threshold of my mouth.  
Shanghai strangled by my clumsy tongue,  
Singapore fragmented against my teeth,  
New York so heavy it falls back down  
the chute of my throat.

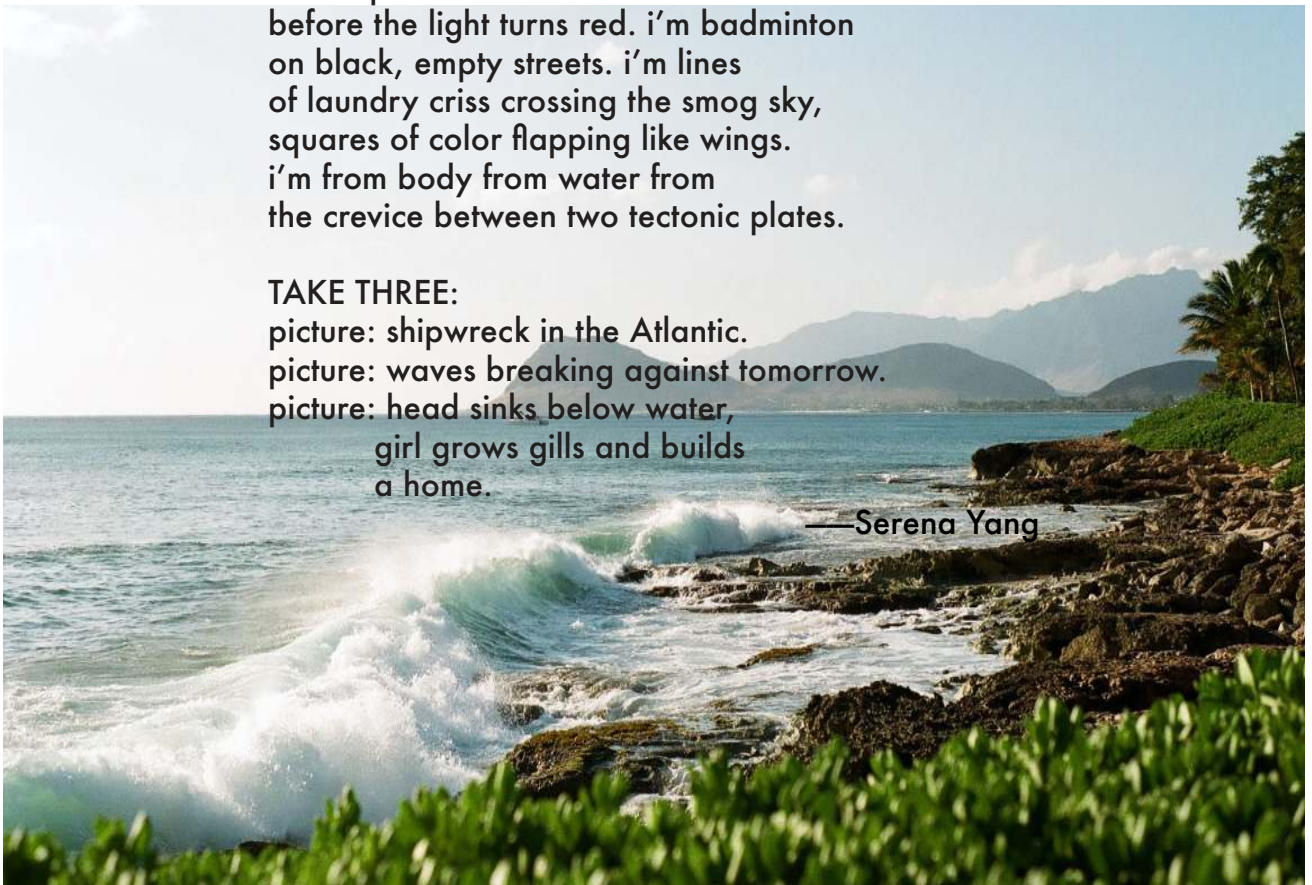
### TAKE TWO:

this is the long story, if long is another  
word for lost is another word for found  
is another word for Frankenstein's monster:  
i'm logs in open fire under a pan half  
a meter wide, vinegar and szechuan chili pepper  
drifting flake by flake into my lungs.  
i'm iced kopi and kaya toast in the mornings,  
i'm soy sauce stirred into two soft-cooked eggs.  
i'm sing's deli on the corner of park  
and ninety six, butter bagel  
wrapped in foil. i'm sprinting  
across park avenue five seconds  
before the light turns red. i'm badminton  
on black, empty streets. i'm lines  
of laundry criss crossing the smog sky,  
squares of color flapping like wings.  
i'm from body from water from  
the crevice between two tectonic plates.

### TAKE THREE:

picture: shipwreck in the Atlantic.  
picture: waves breaking against tomorrow.  
picture: head sinks below water,  
girl grows gills and builds  
a home.

—Serena Yang



## A text I never sent from Greece

Summer isn't the same without you. Even on the other side of the world, I wish you were next to me letting your head rest on my bony shoulder on this grimy coach bus that a thousand other people have sat in because in that moment, God would've blessed these seats like the manger where all the love in the world was born. I wish that we could look at the stars as we float on these lava roofs and even with the heat burning our backs, no matter how much the Greek night wants you for his own, your smile would radiate more than all the stars combined and find your way to me. I wish you were far far away for a bit from a family who doesn't love you like they should and we could both accidentally take a sip of the alcohol at a Greek high school's graduation reception while we wear bougie as fuck outfits. I wish you were here because your presence would whip the government and every business owner into shape and solve the economic crisis. Your giggle would stabilize gas prices and cars would finally grow out of their puberty. I wish that while I'm drowning in the Mediterranean Sea because I'm awful at swimming, you would be here to laugh at me because you'd convert the Aegean into Styx and make me the best swimmer in the world. I wish we could walk these thin roads where everything is either too steep or too low, where there's too much green because the Greeks are too clingy to their trees and we can laugh at every aromatic sex shop we pass by, gasp at the mountains that are there, everywhere you look. You are everywhere I look. There isn't a day that I don't remember how much I love you. I wish we could spend just three weeks making up for time lost and mending our wounds and fixing whatever the fuck is our relationship but damn it if it takes four thousand seven hundred and ninety-three miles and four thousand years I'll take it at the first offer. Don't tell me that you're ok if I don't want to be friends with you anymore. I'm not ok. I am not ok. I'll never be okay. But I'll never be more ok if I don't have you. I will never give up on us. I'll be back soon. Let's hang out, okay?

— Samuel Ahn

# Camp Cobwebs

I don't know if I can go back there.

I always thought I'd be able to. I always dreamed of the day I'd get to return as a full-fledged staff member, ready to love a new batch of kids who believed and swore by the magic of Massachusetts Pines Sleepaway Camp. We were those kids once. Our shirts were sunflower yellow, not night-sky cobalt like the staff. We lived on pixie dust. It came from the mountains and the wish-wash waves of the lake, and it fell like seeds from the top of the flagpole every morning onto our little, sweaty heads. That was us, Jif. Remember? We swore by it because we didn't think about it. We didn't want to know the secrets. But I watched you learn the secrets. I heard it in your voice when you didn't finish your sentences on the soccer field that night. I saw a void in your deep blue eyes where the magic used to be.

Where did it go, Jif? Where did you go?

You haven't been to Massachusetts Pines since that summer. You were a full-fledged staff member with a night-sky cobalt shirt, remember? You treated me like a little sister and I looked at you like you were the smartest guy who ever lived. That's the way it goes when you're fifteen and still a camper. You were seventeen, don't you remember? You were magical.

Why don't you visit anymore, Jif?

It hurts to put these words together. I never thought I'd have to. I never realized how two years could sneak up behind me just to take me away.

Do you ever even think about it?

I don't want to see cobwebs. My old Lincoln Logs bin is all cobwebs. I know it without even looking. All the cabins I used to build when I was a kid are all filled with cobwebs inside that dusty old bin. It's how life goes. You play with something, you leave it for the cobwebs. You told me your high school yearbook is filled with cobwebs. Mine will be too, soon, I think. I wanted to live in a cabin like at camp. I don't want camp to be all cobwebs.

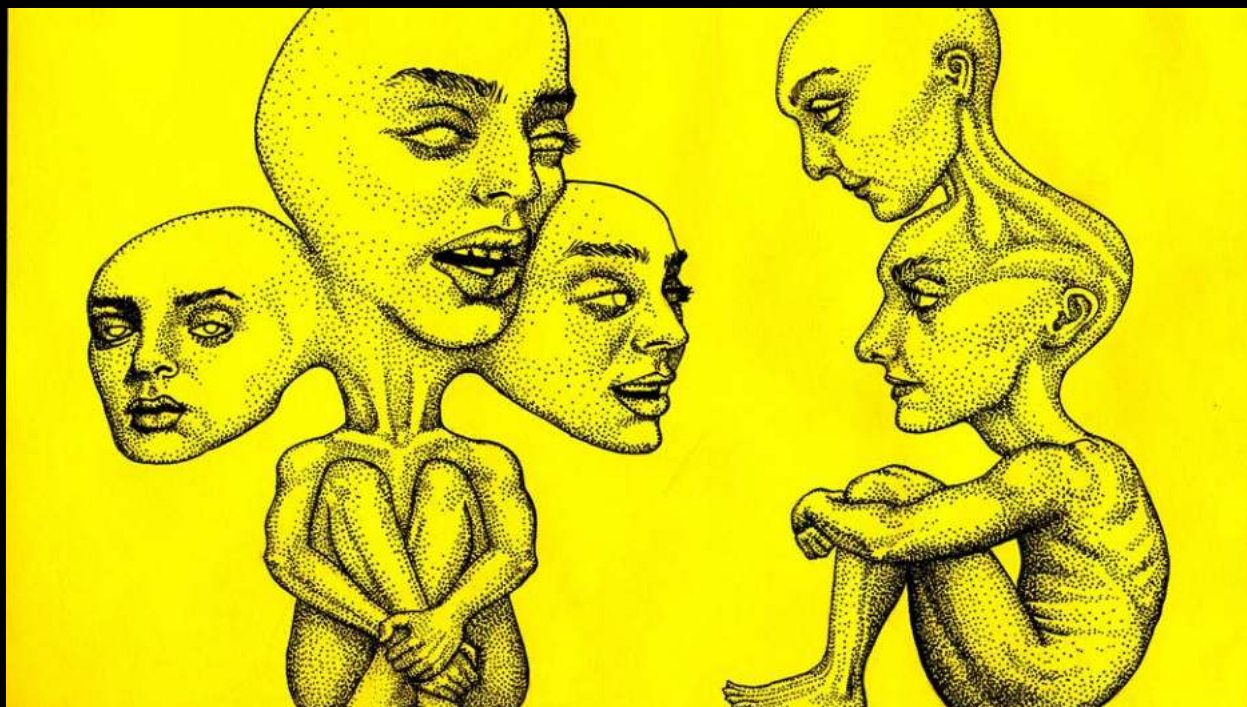
Do you ever get used to cobwebs?

I hear they're calling you Joshua now: the name your parents gave to you, not some silly nickname formulated by a counselor who couldn't remember your actual name. Of course, in college you have to be taken seriously, right? But Jif, you'll never be Joshua to me. If you've grown out of biting your nails when no one's watching and wiping your wiry glasses on your shirt-sleeve, then congratulations. You still do that. You always will in my mind. I heard you wanted a real job. I heard they don't pay much at Massachusetts Pines. Go figure.

Did you ever get a real job?

I almost sent you a letter last year, you know. I wrote the whole long and winding letter, and I even put in an envelope and sealed it and pasted a bright American-flag Forever stamp on it, but then I realized I didn't know what address to send it to now that you're in college. You'll probably never see this either, Jif. Don't worry. I know I think too much. I'm always left alone with the sea in my brain, just the sound of cobwebs echoing off the walls of my skull.

— Bellamy Richardson



## Broken Ghazal For My Ears

In summer we sprawl onto the streets— legs and eyes and ears  
all attune to the heat. Love to become less, I am all ears

as we dissect ourselves. Removed from our bodies, examining  
from afar. Mom has always told me about my ears

and their lobes, thick like Buddha's, a sign of prosperity. In first  
grade we learned homophones and I confused years with ears,

missing the y, the way mom had always said it, equating some truth  
like time with a part of my own transient body. My palms, ears,

pressed with sweat, back bending into cement steps. Once  
a campmate told me she couldn't find a part of my face she liked. My ears,

I wanted to say. I am lucky to have these ears, you can't tell. To be born  
with the width, the weight, years of potential, you see? I want to siphon into my ears

all the sounds of the world. All the words in their correct pronunciations. All  
the city sidewalk summer swell. All of the things I say, and don't. One ear

for each of my two languages. One ear that always catches the y. For now,  
I slump on the stoop and wait to become beautiful under summer sun.

— Claire Shang



# tae kwon do

하나

Hanadusenedassuhyussuhilgopyudulahopyul.

They tell me that's how you count to ten in Korean. I'm sure it's meant to be ten distinct words—하나, 두, 세, 네, 다섯, 여섯, 일곱, 여덟, 아홉, and 열, according to Google Translate—I just couldn't tell you where they begin and end.

I've been very lucky. I know that. I count my blessings. Really, I do. Just not in Korean. My eyelids have creases, my nose has a bridge. Omma hops in a van and rides out to Flushing every Sunday just to thank God for the face my father gave me. My eyes and hair are black, but otherwise it's a very vague face. It's a puzzle. And if Thanksgiving has taught me anything, it's that white people love puzzles. They usually start with a wild guess. It's usually wrong. Some try again, others give up. But, without fail, all roads end in "Where are you from?" `p

"Manhattan," I say. That's biracial for "what a dumb question."

But the most persistent (bless them) specify "nonono, like... where are you from?" when mine isn't exotic enough of an answer.

So I cling to syllables and shapes I can't decipher and hope that's enough.

두

There's a black hole in our apartment. I've never seen it; I don't think it's something you can see. Or I didn't. But then that picture came out and now I don't know what to think. In any case, it's in the cabinet in the corner of our living room. I think.

Black holes pull everything in their direction. You can't blame them for it; it's just what they do. So it didn't take me very long to figure out where ours was. See, when you walk past the cabinet in the corner of our living room, it switches from pulling you forward to pulling you back and it feels like the world's shifting beneath your feet and there's nothing you can do but stand very still. And when you walk right toward it, the pull gets stronger and stronger until you have to walk away because you're scared of falling in. There are days when you'll get as far away as you can and lock yourself in the bathroom and sit in the shower and let the water run until the pull gets faint enough that it feels like it's coming from inside of you and maybe that means you're in control. And there are others when you walk right up to the thing and try to pry open the doors but you can't because they're being held shut from the inside. And then there are days when there's no pull at all and somehow those are the worst of all.

세

In 2009, I decided I was going to do taekwondo. I was six and I wasn't sure what it meant, but I knew it excited me. For those of you who aren't sure either, taekwondo means white pajamas and balsa wood and hanadusenedassuhyussuhilgopyudulahopyul. Wikipedia says it's "a Korean martial art, characterized by its emphasis on head-height kicks, jumping and spinning kicks, and fast kicking techniques." But anyone could have written that.

I think the draw for me was really the boards. I was a very polite kid, I still don't see the use in violence, but there was something so attractive about the idea of some guy holding up a perfectly good piece of wood just so that I could split it in half with my foot. Omma wanted me to understand that this was going to be a big commitment and that once she signed me up there was no backing out because these classes were very expensive. I just wanted to kick a board in two.

I liked taekwondo. I was good at it. It made sense to me. There was a lot of bowing, a lot of wide-legged stances, a lot of kicking the air, a lot of counting. That was it for a while.

I can't remember when boards finally came into the mix, just that by the time I quit I had broken a

I think it's getting bigger. Or at least the pull is getting stronger. I'm not sure what happened, but I came home one day and the living room looked different, smaller, somehow. And then it hit me that it had all shifted a few inches closer to the cabinet in the corner. And now my sofa is bolted to the floor. The water at the kitchen sink doesn't come out straight anymore. And now I've learned to hold my cup an inch or two to the right. The pictures on our walls don't stay there for long and when they fall, they fall out, not down. And now I'm tired of sweeping up glass so our walls are white again.

It's really not as bad as it sounds. I've told friends about it and they keep telling me we need to find a new place but they just don't seem to get that our place is rent stabilized and certain sacrifices need to be made. My only real concern is that the cabinet is made of wood. And if my tiny foot could break a plank of wood as easily as it did, then it can't be long before that cabinet splinters and snaps and gets sucked up inside itself.

## 다섯

Some memories are hard to recall or hard to relive, either because they're just too painful or it's just been too long. And some memories are slippery. These are the ones that you can't get a hold of, that you risk losing altogether, that don't feel like they should have ever happened.

Taekwondo is all very slippery to me. I don't remember how long I stayed in classes—not very long. I don't remember what color my belt was when I left. It was one of the first two. I want to say it was yellow. I want to say I remember earning the right to trade up. I think, though, that I left with a band of white around my waist. The belt you get just for showing up.

The truth is I don't know where I left off. All I know is that whatever belt I was wearing, I slipped it off without bothering to untie so it lay on the floor in a neat circle around my feet. Then I walked away and I haven't seen it since.

And I wish I had kept it. Not that I have any real use for it; the odds of it fitting me are slim now that I'm not. I just want to have it to look at it and hold it in my hands and know that it's real and I'll be happy either way as long as it means I'm not lost somewhere between white and yellow.

## 여섯

It took me a little while before I realized the thing in our living room was a black hole. It didn't take me long to notice it, there were just a couple months at first when I wasn't sure what to call it. And as scary as it was to realize that I had a black hole in my apartment, it was better than not knowing what I was afraid of.

It took me a little while longer to understand why I was right to be afraid. The universe is old and big and I used to think that being old and big meant doing whatever you wanted. But there are some rules that even it doesn't break. The universe keeps a log of information about everything inside. And no one object will last forever, but the information about it does, or it's supposed to. The really scary thing about black holes is that, as far as I can tell, they swallow up and destroy anything that fails to keep a safe distance, and they take the information with it.

That terrifies me. Because if the thing in my living room can eat up that information, then it can eat up parts of the past and maybe the past doesn't exist at all. And if that's true then I think I should move.

## 일곱

I've come to the conclusion that I'm too proud of the fact that I'm Korean. Yes, it's something to be proud of; it's a significant part of who I am; it's 50% of my DNA. But it's been a long time since I left the dojang and lost fluency and lost touch with the culture I so readily claim ownership of.

Korea isn't mine.



Korea is photos of me picking peaches at the farm in Daechang, perched on the shoulders of an uncle whose name I can't remember or pronounce. Korea is VHS tapes we can't play anymore of me and my sister singing and laughing in a language that's become foreign over time. Korea is a hanbok I outgrew years ago, it's shards of wood, it's a belt I may or may not have earned. Korea was stashed neatly away in the cabinet in the corner of our living room, and now it's lost to the void.

여덟

One of my friends told me that black holes aren't actually scary at all. And he didn't mean to offend because it was just something he had read and how could he have known that I live with one? But I let him explain himself because maybe he would be right and I could stop being afraid.

He told me that if I were to get lost inside of a black hole, I could escape, but not back into our universe. He told me that I'd find myself someplace entirely new, one of infinite other universes where things had worked out differently. He told me that he got cut off because he didn't have a subscription.

And now I tell myself that one of these days I'll let myself be pulled in close to the cabinet I've been avoiding and if the doors don't open I'll kick my way in and I'll get swallowed up and away. And I'll find all the things I've lost and I'll find myself in a place that looks the same but feels different. I tell myself I have nothing left to lose.

아홉

When I finally do, and I will, I'll find what I've been looking for. Not a black hole I invented, not a language I forgot. I'll find the taekwondo belt that's been gathering dust since I left it behind. And it will have taken me ten years.

Count them:

열

— Chance Lockard











## Midwinter Elegy

i. words you breathe  
tumble down my neck,  
trailing off like dewdrops  
in winter. ice flows freely  
from the corner of your  
parched lips, signaling to  
me: let's stop talking.  
my cathexis over your  
unspoken crystals holds  
me back from rushing into  
the moment where blizzards  
have stopped.

ii. your glance hardens  
its way through my frozen  
clear-ice skin, in brittle feelings  
submersed in sheaths of  
snow. my armory is fast melting  
although it's january &  
the sun will streak  
in cold shafts of light.  
eye meets eye in the  
realization that storm clouds  
don't cover tundras, that  
your arctic blue soaks  
through my defenseless hail.

iii. sharpened sounds strike,  
stalactites streaming though  
sweetened air: perfumed  
tension. my voice cracks:  
you turn away from my  
blizzard, creating your own  
refuge from bitter shards  
hurled towards you like rubber  
arrows, unable to make you see  
what my frozen lips feel.  
it's over, you say, and walk away.

— Sanjana Kaicker



## frost

is your heart  
as cold as these ungloved hands?  
does the steam leaking  
from these frost-reddened lips  
presage an impending inferno?  
I will not kiss you  
lest your flames lick my body white-hot,  
graverobber of color.  
your scarlet cheeks  
remind me of that fallen angel  
whose imprint you rub into the snow.

— Jade Meyer



# There

To be is the easiest thing in the world, said no one ever, as easy as breathing.

\*

Earlier, you tipped your head back in the shower and let the soap suds slide down your skin. You turned the water to scalding so it warmed the marrow in your bones, to freezing to keep the shine in your hair, then off because you couldn't bear to waste water. Your nerves tingled.

Before you reached for your towel, you cupped a breast in each hand. The right one lay heavier than the left, how it had always been as long as you remembered. Your grandmother had told you once that pressing on them would make them grow, so you pushed down on the left one as hard as you could until it ached, wondered if today would be the day it worked.

But for now this was the body you were given, and so you patted yourself dry with the towel and looked at yourself in the mirror. Your face was a smear beginning to drip down the surface. You leaned forward to comb your hair, and then you put down the comb, sat down on the toilet seat, and pushed the palms of your hands into your eyes. This time you were not trying to make them grow; you were only trying not to cry, so your mother would not come knocking on the door. You never forgot that you were an ugly crier.

\*

Now, you are barefoot on the wooden floors like your mother told you never to be, leaving damp footprints that fade as you move. You are waiting for the right moment to dry your hair, but it is already dry in clumps down your back. You are waiting for the water to boil, but you have just put the kettle on and it will be ten minutes at least.

Now that you have left the bathroom, your mother is bustling inside, clucking her tongue at the wet towels and the puddles you have left on the tiles. The tap begins to run.

Do you think it will rain tomorrow, she calls from the bathroom, muffled by the water. You check your phone to answer her and watch the little thunder symbol flash and flash, thinking you can feel the sky vibrating in your palm. For a moment you are holding something larger than life

But you do not know how to tell if it will rain tomorrow; you only know how to listen.

Yes, I think so, you say to your mother, and the kettle starts to whistle.

\*

Later, you will crawl into bed, and the sheets will chafe at places you rarely touch. You will wonder if you had lost all the cells you needed to in the shower that day, and if you have any left to spare. You will wonder what would happen if you don't and imagine your basal cells frantically dividing, struggling to seal the cracks before the outside rushes in.

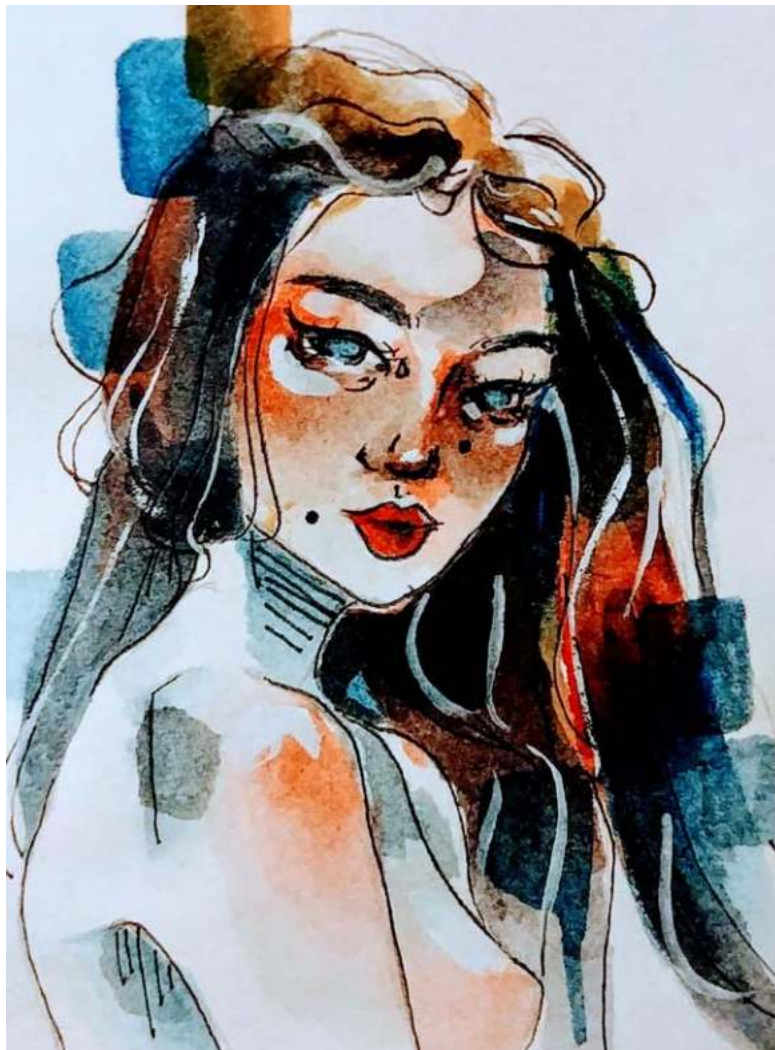
You close your eyes and wish you could see behind your eyelids, and for a moment you think you can. You tumble with your red blood cells into circulation and dissolve into the plasma.

\*

Sometime in the middle of the night you might wake, and your eyes may have adjusted to the dark.

Oh, you might think—here, there is the ceiling. There is something I can reach.

— Grace Tian





## From Just Outside Central Park

Sometimes I feel soft and malleable  
like you could tip my head gently back and I would melt,  
honey dripping from my fingertips. Open to feeling, easy to change.  
These are the good afternoons—my city grey and damp while the trees blaze  
orange, yellow, red, refusing to be put out.  
Of course, the line is fine between soft and weak,  
soft and breakable. And I am breakable far more often.  
I can be slipped out of my skin like a peach soaked in hot water.  
On those days, the trees droop. Leaves too heavy, branches swollen with moisture,  
colors dull.  
Peace and resignation and lethargy are too close together, stumbling along hand in  
hand in hand.  
It's too easy to drop from one to the other, much harder to drag myself out  
of the hole I dug for myself.  
I want to try. I want to want to try.  
Softness shouldn't mean spinelessness shouldn't mean collapsed in on myself.  
I need my outline back before I can start shading myself in.  
Maybe then I can be soft again and safe too.  
And the trees will start looking up.

— Isha Vasudev

## Headlines

### **Maude Lechner Milks Cows at Midnight — Read More, Look Now**

I blink

cows?

In my city concrete homeless newspaper Times Square Rockefeller bagel?

I think not!

I think not such a thing!

### **Maude Lechner Failing Quickly — Best Look Now Lest She's Gone**

But my hands are holding! Aren't they?

I check

Yes! My hands are holding one another

I'm not

falling?

Failing? Unless you count counting I've no fear of falling  
(failing I mean)

### **Maude Lechner, Secret Enthusiast — Can't Stop Looking**

Oh, but I can't

Life fills up flowerpots

soil soil soil

It's not a secret, I thought.

I think!

The sky!

look up

how could you not

how couldn't anyone

Not me.

— Maude Lechner



## Ave Maria

Today I came to see you in a church  
and though I could not find you there  
a preacher still dared to tell me about  
how you had been a servant of god.

I stood in the back the whole time  
gripping the pew in front of me  
trying to stay upright.  
I sung when I was told to sing.

Today I met a baby in a church.  
Her mother held her backwards  
away from you and facing me  
because she couldn't bear to let her look.

I was standing behind the mother and  
the baby locked eyes with me.  
At first I think my demeanor quite upset her  
but I stuck my tongue out and she smiled.

She reached out and grabbed my finger  
and I thought about how she didn't know  
who you were or why I had looked at her  
with so much anger in my eyes.

I smiled at her, tears streaming down my face  
through Ave Maria, in a hail mary attempt  
to keep her from finding out where she was.  
She cried anyway.  
The mother mouthed "thank you" as they left.

— Carter Williams



## I Configure Home

→ Somewhere between Jiading, Shanghai [ 31°22'N, 121°15'E ; 6 meters above sea level ] and Xishui, Hubei [ 30°27'N, 115°15'E ; 31 meters above sea level ]

I am on a train west from Shanghai to Hubei, and I can't get the legend of Sun Wukong out of my mind. It's a long story, one that took many bedtimes for my dad to tell, but this is the part that has lodged itself into some corner of my brain and refused to budge: the monkey king, in a fit of ego and ignorance, angers the Buddha. The Buddha traps him under his hand. Hand becomes mountain. Five hundred years later, a monk frees Sun Wukong, on the condition that he aids the monk on his pilgrimage to the west.

Outside the train window, the lush, wet green of the Chinese countryside flashes by, and I find myself tracing the curve of the hills, mapping the topography of the land as the bumps and wrinkles of a human hand. A farmer stands on the peak of a knuckle, a dirt road winds around the sharp crook of a little finger. I tear my eyes away, only for rolling green hills to leap out of the dark. In an attempt to find sleep, I try to calculate how many generations a family grows by over the course of five hundred years. I quickly give up trying to contemplate the vastness of five centuries, and I fall asleep imagining the monkey king leaping from finger to finger in the Buddha's open, waiting palm.

China is a living thing. Even when I sleep, it clogs my sinuses and sometimes it sits on my chest, demanding something I can't give. Once it asked for my lungs, and I said, but I need *my lungs to breathe*. No, it said, *you haven't breathed in weeks*.

→ Wuhan, Hubei [ 30°35'N, 114°18'E ; 15 meters above sea level ]

When I wake up, my nose is stuffed again and I sneeze twice before my mom leans over the aisle to hand me a tissue and tell me that we're here. Here, meaning Wuhan, Hubei's capital. Wuhan, meaning, still a nearly two hour drive away from here.

My aunt's friend's brother's something picks us up from the train station in a rickety old car. The day is yellow and brown and dusty and I am reminded of a desert, even though my moisture-heavy clothes cling to my skin and the air is much clearer here than in Shanghai. My sister packs herself into the backseat after me, then my mom after her. My dad climbs into the passenger seat.

The small talk should be awkward, because my aunt's friend's brother's something doesn't actually know my dad in any way more substantial than simply in passing. But this middle-aged, balding, belly spilling over belt man is from Xishui too, and that's enough for my dad to slip into boisterous, familiar dialect and talk like the man is his own cousin.

→ Xishui, Hubei [ 30°27'N, 115°15'E ; 31 meters above sea level ]

Two hours later, here is small town Xishui. I don't like calling it "small town," because that's quaint and picturesque and picket fence in every way Xishui isn't.

"Village" isn't quite right either, because while it might've been a village when my dad had been growing up in it, today's Xishui, my Xishui, isn't grass huts and unpaved roads and goats in the yard.

There are chickens though. I see them sometimes. My aunt says the neighbors keep two hens for fresh eggs, and one rooster to piss off anyone who likes sleeping past way-too-early o'clock.

My grandparents' building reminds me of the city. It's gray and tall and compact, a patchwork quilt of a building. It's clear it wasn't built all at once, and the cement walls reverberate with resilience when you talk too loud inside. Some parts of the quilt have been there from the beginning, and newer, cleaner rooms grow out of it. Bare, gray stairs climb the side of the building, leading to the different apartments. Every blood relative on my dad's side grew up in this building, and the traditional double doors are heavy with history. My grandparents like to keep the doors open so fresh air can come in.

I've been here before, but only ever on the communal first floor and in the newer apartments with the nice wood floors and air conditioned bedrooms. Tonight, I settle into one of the air conditioned bedrooms with my sister, in my aunt's apartment with the nice wood floors. My parents sleep downstairs in a free room on the other side of the wall of the family shrine.

This time, the small-town-village-city sitting on my chest asks me to remember. *Remember what*, I ask, except no sound comes out because there is an empty space in my ribs where my lungs should be. A monkey leaps from rib to rib, each bone he lands on cracking beneath his feet.

I help with the laundry the next day, and when it's time to hang up all the clothes to dry, my grandma sets down the fish she's gutting, wipes her hands clean on a rag, and takes me to the roof. We climb the bare, gray stairs. My grandmother greets the tenants on the second floor, tells me about the eight year old girl who cooks every meal for her family because her mother is sick and her grandparents are even sicker. I don't say anything. My grandmother doesn't wait for me to.

When we get to the roof, my grandmother waits for me to step over the raised threshold first. Your *Yang laojia*, she says from behind me. Your hometown. Your Yang family home. *Jia*, meaning house, meaning home, meaning family. The idea of family and home so closely related that one word insinuates both the tangible and intangible. *Lao*, meaning old, *laojia* meaning hometown, registering in my mind as a thick tangle of roots mapping the inside of my skull.

My feet pause and a sock drops from my armful of laundry. My grandmother brushes past me, immediately bustling about the roof and hanging up the dresses draped over her arm. I know that by *Yang laojia*, she means this roof, this square of concrete and plaster that has never been built over or torn down. Stacks of new floors and new rooms rise around it. After a moment, I begin to move too. I easily cross the roof in six steps. Thin metal poles criss cross overhead, just low enough that if I stand on my tip toes right below a pole, a hair or two brushes the metal. I drape the laundry over the poles and clip them in place. I finish at the end of a row, the edge of the roof a half step to my right. I can see almost everything in Xishui from here--there aren't many buildings taller than this old family home. Old family home. I don't know what that means.

I breathe in deep, suck in so much air I can feel my lungs push against my ribs. Xishui creeps into my sinuses, and my eyes begin to sting. I sneeze. The air escapes all at once.



→ Baodao Peak, Dabie Mountains, Hubei [ 31 °6'N, 115 °34'E ; 347 meters above sea level ]

The next day, my aunt takes us deep into the Dabie Mountains, which balance on the border between Hubei, Henan, and Anhui. It's strange to think of a mountain range balancing. That's the mountain we'll be climbing, she says, and points at one of the massive moss-covered rocks dotting the landscape. *Bao Dao Shan*. My dad says the name means "sharp blade mountain." I squint at the towering jut of rock with one eye then the other, and I decide that it looks more like Buddha's third knuckle than a sharp blade mountain.

The path up Buddha's third knuckle is so twisting and obscured by green, green, and more green, that I can't see the way it winds all the way up and around the mountain. I can only see the steps up to maybe twenty or so meters ahead, and as one step disappears behind me another appears. This is how the next few hours go—one deceiving step closer to the top at a time, and never being able to see the whole distance. My lungs, filled with thin mountain air, flutter weakly. My legs protest by cramping viciously every time I try to move them, and soon, I feel faintly motion sick in my own body. I had forgotten to bring a jacket, and all over my skin is the ticklish, crawling sensation of being cold and warm at the same time.

The clouds are so close I almost feel them skimming the top of my head, leaving drops of dew on my hair. I wonder how Sun Wukong kept his heart beating for five hundred years under the weight of the Buddha's mountain. I wonder how he didn't simply flatten under the pressure, grind into dust and scatter into the soil. I feel hollow, like once the pressure breaks my skin I will pop like a balloon. For the first time, I invite the country into my body, gasping and grasping at the intangible—I want it to fill my lungs and stay. It becomes reflex. If I don't get enough air, my legs will stop moving and then I will be stranded here, halfway up a mountain balancing on a border. I inhale, desperately. I solidify.

By the time we reach the peak, I am carrying something heavy inside me, something real and just beneath my skin. I imagine shedding, imagine peeling back the top layer of myself. I marvel at what I find. I think of this country sitting on my chest at night, pushing and pushing and asking for vacancies. It had only been trying to return home. Now, my chest expands easily, my ribs gently pushing out with each deep inhale.

— Serena Yang



## I Do Not Know How

I do not know how to forgive you. So I tell you  
how I wished for you. Must have been  
nearly two dollars in change. Must have been  
every dandelion, every fountain. I tell you how I used to  
watch you. How I made myself the wounded animal  
and lay at your feet. How you did not touch me,  
but you did sit next to me, so I picked up my heart  
between my teeth and looked at you.

It just happens sometimes. You kiss someone  
too soon. Or not enough. Or they have  
a beautiful friend at the wrong time. For you,  
I unlearned jealousy. Spent nights with a mirror  
and an uncalled phone. I guess that does something  
to a girl. I guess you felt bad – the way I used to dream  
myself blonde in front of you. How I asked  
to be small. Tried to pretend I could be hurt  
by someone other than you. As if  
you didn't teach me hurt, and how to hurt.

Even in winter, there are things I do not know how  
to reconcile. That you did not tell me how to want you.  
That I did not write enough poems about you.  
That you did not love me, and now that you do,  
I do not know how to let you.

Grace Novarr



## To Fell a Friendship

When I first saw the wilted solemn tree, its leaves turned ashen and brittle,

The grooves of the bark sink into the delves of my hand (its roughness to my flesh)  
the leaves which cling to its body softly bite the earthen floor,  
building a magnificent bridge of woven earthly lines, dragging toward  
the naked tree from which it came decapitated; Skin to sky, root to earth, and to  
your soul trailing in front of me.

When I looked inwards, I realized that I must cut down the dead mass

Bare and naked, the tree is blanketed in searing summer air, seeping into  
the crevices from which we had sawed and plucked off the branches.  
Oozing sap pours hot onto my hands as the silver of my blade sinks its jaws,  
sickly skin to silver, cutting deeper and deeper,  
revealing a ring for each year you and I lost.

And When I looked at You, you who were still alive and vibrant,

The bridge is now fully formed, from life, to death, to a swirling mass of shadows;  
till you gazed beyond to the now barren meadow  
till I looked at You, for you had disappeared.

Staring at my hands, and I realize now that you and I had just  
grown apart.

— Manon Fuch

