

XORIOR

— L I T E R A R Y M A G A Z I N E —

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CHICAGO
ASIAN
WRITERS
WORKSHOP

Mission Statement

Chicago Asian Writers Workshop (CAWW) is a creative writing workshop for Asian diasporic writers and writers of color based in Chicago and the Midwest. It was founded in summer 2020 by writer and bookseller Amélie Ng Pavel, thanks to a generous grant from The University of Chicago. Its mission is to uplift and contextualize Asian voices in America, and to practice radical inclusivity by providing a literary and artistic space to nurture emerging writers of color. It is inspired by the Asian American Writers Workshop (AAWW) in New York City, founded in 1991. CAWW aims to make heard literature of migration, race, social justice, and intersectional feminism, and most importantly, to found a community of writers of color in Chicago, and more broadly, in the Midwest.

Editor's note

In summer 2020, CAWW hosted two workshops, in fiction and in poetry for young writers of Asian descent between the ages of 18 and 35. This magazine is a collection of some of the works produced during the workshop. The project is continuing into Summer 2021 with generous support from the Stories Matter Foundation of Chicago. This magazine was made possible by a grant from the University of Chicago.

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mythology of how my parents met

Shreya

my mom was there because her mom said go in the air I don't care how you get there just go and I'll figure out the rest. my mom was there for grad school / had big hair / went to the temple on New Year's Day where she met a man wearing a Northwestern Rose Bowl sweatshirt and she asked him "do you think they're gonna win?"

my dad was in Germany that day and he had big hair and an email address that his aunt kept in her pocket for if she happened to see someone at the temple. my dad was in Germany / he had a physics degree / he had clip-on earrings. my dad's first name is Subramanian but everyone calls him Kartik and he doesn't have a last name.

my mom figured victory rested on the will of God alone so when the man in the sweatshirt asked if she wanted to join a bhajan group she said yes and signed up for the carpool.

my mom met my dad's aunt in the carpool, she stuck out a piece of paper she said "I have a nephew" and my mom figured taking an offering in the bhajan group carpool is the holy thing to do / would make up for the divorce / would make up for the bellbottoms.

my dad emailed my mom because his aunt gave him the address / because my mom promptly lost the sheet of paper after putting it in her coat pocket. my dad insisted they wrote novels / letters / emails to each other for a month before deciding to meet up at the New Orleans Jazz Festival because they both loved Miles Davis / Taco Bell / leather jackets / meat, even though they weren't supposed to. my mom figured she could ditch him for Dave Matthews if that wasn't enough.

my mom had an allergic reaction to a crab po'boy that night / had to go to the hospital / had to wake up my dad to call an ambulance because he was the only person in the city she knew.

they fell in love in the ambulance / in the waiting room / on the drive home / when mom got pregnant / at some point / I think.

when I ask my mom about this story I tell her I thought she went to the temple because Northwestern had already won the Rose Bowl / because she believed it was an act of God / because she thought it would be a good time to start praying / a good time for worship / a good omen. she says the Rose Bowl is always played on the first of January and so that would have been impossible. she says to this day she still doesn't know who won.



Revolutionary Beijing: Prelude and Review

Bofan Zhang

1

He was after
A red man
In a red crowd

The red crowd replied
No red man here

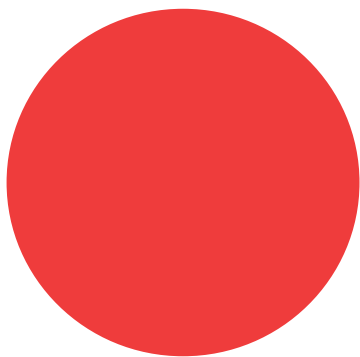
Only red

2

You never knew and never wanted to
know
The colors of some places
For example
The color of Perfect Brightness

3

Mist is where emotionality and
thought
Collected and unleashed:



4

Fit for man's wear
This sunny day
Grows broad shoulders

And a smile
According to relevant policy
Banned anywhere else

5

Following women

A
h
h
h
Spring of Beijing

6

Under lunar
A lunatic
Veiling reality
By philosophy and art

Indeed
A man
Helping himself
Into pajamas

7

The rain before night
Had no literary context

Simply
Bad work

It should be sent back to that
sky
Rewrite

8

We must clean the street ads
Down on those veined alleys
Especially when they show
signs of freedom by peeling

For the beauty of our city
Let the walls be liberated and
May they always teach us
something healthy

9

It seems these words are
from someone
who really loves nature



Kainat and the Birds

Tehzeeb Usmani

The woman stumbled into the Kalamazoo Holiday Inn's lobby, dragging forty-two pounds of meat in a gargantuan trash bag behind her. It slid and groaned against the lobby's tiling, leaving an oily snail trail in its path. When she crossed the carpet, the bag whirlwinded a halo of dust over her head. She wheezed the rest of the way to the reception desk. The worst part, though, was the smell, which teetered between rotten and downright rancid, a stench that would linger in the lobby for the next six months. Over that time no less than a dozen guests would heave their insides outside, the moment they caught a whiff of that scent.

At the check in desk, the woman placed her driver's license in the receptionist's quivering hands. Some of the red crust under her fingernails flaked into his palm. She was mouthing something to herself in a language he couldn't understand but had seen on a popular television drama, from the mouth of a bearded villain right before he blew up his body in a crowded train station. He flinched. The woman in front of him had one of those names that Midwesterners (namely, the sort who grew up saying *aunt* and *ant* with the same nasally *aaa*) had a tendency to sound out once or twice in their heads before spitting out like the last letter with a question mark. The receptionist was one of these people. Tonight, lacking the guts to risk getting it wrong, he handed her a room key without a word.

Up the elevator and down the third floor the woman limped, the bag a heavy tail behind her. Guests stared hard at the balding carpet to avoid her gaze. People did not usually come to the Kalamazoo Holiday Inn seeking a meat locker. They came looking for a quiet place off I-94 to spend the night en route from Detroit to Chicago. But the woman had no qualms about defying this convention; she'd performed much more profane acts in much more sacred spaces.

The woman entered her room and headed straight for the bathroom, where she heaved the bag into the tub in three slow, swings, the up down motion of an amateur cricket batswoman. Though she hadn't played in years, what's ingrained in muscle memory returns with the most unexpected of cues. Then, she collapsed onto the toilet seat, emptying the contents of her coat pocket haphazardly onto the sink counter: A passport, a sheaf of boarding passes, a small box of pills.

Her phone rang when she drew it from her pocket. The woman gazed at her face in the mirror as if to summon strength from her reflection. She took a deep breath before picking up.

"Salaam, Ammi," she sighed.

"We expected you an hour ago, Kainat. Where are you? You're not having another — another down spell, are you?" Her mother's voice was pitched with alarm.

"I'm fine, Ammi. I'm just stopping in Kalamazoo for the night. I'll be in Charlevoix in time for Eid prayers in the morning."

"I'll get the kheer ready for you then."

"Ammi, you *know* I can't eat dairy."

"Tch, you mean you *choose* not to eat my kheer. So privileged, that you have that decision to make!"

It had been five years since Kainat had gone vegan, during her first semester at Oberlin. But every Eid, her mother still crusaded against her conversion as if it was a personal affront to her love. Which, in Ammi's mind, it was. Besides, who'd ever heard of a vegan Pakistani?



"The poor children back Home will be eating kitcheree tomorrow morning instead," her mother continued, each word a dagger. "And still they'll eat it without complaining because their mothers cooked it with love and —"

"Fine, Ammi, I'll eat the kheer," Kainat groaned. "But I absolutely will not eat the meat you sent. I'm bringing it back with me to put in your freezer."

"What meat?"

"Forty-two pounds of whole chicken delivered to my apartment this morning by Ibrahim & Sons."

"Never heard of them," her mother shrilled. "I had nothing to do with this."

Kainat and her reflection rolled their eyes in the mirror at each other disbelievingly.

"Maybe they made a mistake, sent a package to the wrong person. I'll call around. Regardless, you realize it won't keep overnight in the room?"

"Maybe I'll keep it in the trunk," Kainat said. "It might be cold enough at night, outside."

"Don't be ridiculous. They'll go rancid in an hour. You love animals so much, how could you violate their corpses like that? You'll have to cut them up and find someplace cold to store it," her mother continued. She launched into a detailed account of how, exactly, one was to correctly cut up and preserve whole chickens.

What Kainat really wanted to know was what her mother thought about the possibility of modern-day miracles. The topic had been on her mind the whole day, since she'd left Nashville six hours ago, but she couldn't imagine how to broach the topic. To propose such a decidedly weird incident as the meat sack's arrival as proof of God seemed preposterous. Besides, though Allah was always on Ammi's tongue, mashallahs and inshallahs essential ingredients to her vocabulary as salt to meat, the workings of the divine was not anything they'd ever discussed. Their conversations dwelled on more surface level conceit, scolding and unsolicited advice, by Ammi, and acquiescence, by Kainat.

Kainat grabbed the Holiday Inn branded notepad and pen from the counter and scribbled down random excerpts from her mother's instructions. *Pluck, sever, cleave, keep*. The list played itself over and over in her head while her mother droned on, a carnivore's dhikr. She felt herself once again falling into that heavy daze again.

The package had arrived about an hour before Kainat left for Charlevoix. She was lying on the floor, chanting the Jesus prayer from *Franny and Zooey*, when the doorbell rang. An existential cloud of dread had filled up all the space in her head, weighed her body down to the floor like a ballast. It had been part of her routine every day for the last month. Get back from work, shower, and lay on the ground, water puddling from hair onto the floorboards, appealing to a divine entity. One, she recognized, that may or may not exist. It was this uncertainty that really got to her. Searching for meaning in a string of meaningless words, or prayer, as her mother called it.

Warily, she lifted her body and tossed *Franny and Zooey* onto the stack of books that had consumed her free hours over her last month (the most recent three: *The Simone Weil Reader*, *The Tao Te Ching*, *the Jain Agamas*). She tugged her feet towards the front door and peeled it open. The hallway was empty, but for a black trash bag stooped on her beaten welcome mat. She stooped over to take a closer look.

Inside was a heap of chickens, feathered and still. It was impossible that they were alive — the birds were missing their heads, their bare necks fountaining red to the floor — yet, for a moment, she imagined that they were only sleeping in somber peace. That any moment now, they would wake up and waddle their way into Kainat's apartment, settle under the sinks and tables.

Any other recipient of such a delivery might have exhibited some degree of alarm, but Kainat simply knelt on her knees to knot the bag shut. She was accustomed to receiving strange items in bulk from her mother: a dozen scrubbers, approximate in size to an elephant's toothbrush for reaching the mold between the tub and floor; a hundred pack of disposable, water-proof, iridescent hijabs for praying in a pinch; six gallons of holy water from Mecca that had been sanctioned for use in protein smoothies. No, the arrival of the meat was, in itself, not a bizarre event. She would deal with it after another hour spent curled on her apartment floor reciting the Jesus prayer, and hopefully, relieving herself of the blinding fog in her head. She turned towards the door.

What was inexplicable was the sound that Kainat heard from the bag as she reached for the doorknob — *you're imagining things again*, she scolded herself, and willed her body to keep moving — but there it was again, louder, more urgently, a smothered cluck. She flung her body around, but the bag had fallen silent. With trembling fingers, she tugged the knot undone and peered at the motionless meat.

Kainat started, hesitated, then reached in and fished around, brushing rivulets of blood aside to recover a pinked piece of paper from beneath a wilting wattle. Perhaps it had been shifting under the weight of the dripping blood, her overactive imagination filling animal sounds in between the paper's rustles. She uncrumpled it.

*Ibrahim and Sons Halal Grocers
Order 2260
42 lb whole chicken (zabiha)*

The culprit could only be her mother. Who else would think to deliver any meat — let alone ritually slaughtered chicken — to a vegan's doorstep? She would call the butchery, explain the purchase was a mistake, and bring the package back to them. Maybe they could even resell the meat so nothing would have to be wasted. She googled the shop's name and address to find a phone number.

The first link that popped up on her phone's screen was a story from the Quran called Ibrahim and the Birds. She recalled the title, fleetingly, from her Sunday School days at the Charlevoix mosque. She clicked on the link and read: Basically, Abraham asked Allah to show him how She raised the dead, and Allah asked why Her prophet needed evidence of Her power. Abraham said: *Just to reassure my heart*. Allah told Abraham to cleave a bird into four pieces and scatter them over the mountains, then call them back. And when Abraham's voice echoed over the peaks, bits of birds cleaved together right over Abraham's head. Q.E.D., Allah is real, Allah is almighty.

It was a stupid story, Kainat thought, and then she noticed the classical Arabic verse on the bottom of the page. She tried to shape her tongue around the sounds. It had been years since she'd picked up the Quran, and she had some trouble fitting the letters into each other at first. The second try came out more smoothly as the sing-song cadence of the ancient language returned to her. She recited again and again, until she'd memorized every syllable and could shut her eyes while she spoke, watch the cloud in her head dissipate into a placid, deep blue lake.

She lost count of the number of repetitions. She felt, giddily, that she might breathe freely again.

Afterwards, she opened her eyes, looked up towards the ceiling, and began heaving in laughter. “Hey, is this supposed to be a miracle?” she shouted. That a butcher’s shop and Google should know the answer to her prayers better than the theologians, holy books, and spiritual literature she’d spent the last month agonizing over was funny enough. That the religion she’d been running away from was the only one that could deliver relief to her mind and soul was pure comedy.

Many of the world’s most celebrated spiritual journeys were triggered by some unimaginable act, some leap of faith, that some might call at least inexplicable and most insane. Ivan Ilyich welcomed his death, Abraham killed the bird, and Kainat dragged the bag of meat into the trunk of her car. She left Nashville before she could change her mind.

Mrs. Abdul Raheem twisted the phone cord out of its coils after her daughter hung up. She looked down to see that she’d absent-mindedly wrapped the phone cable around the length of her finger, her brown skin blushing blue at the tip. The Abdul Raheems owned what was quite possibly the last corded landline phone in the state of Michigan, a precaution in case the electricity went out. Kainat had told her to get rid of it last time she was home. *There’s no load shedding here*, she’d said. *You’re in Michigan, not Lahore*. As if Mrs. Abdul Raheem had needed any reminding of the ocean that separated Pakistan’s heart from Charlevoix.

She strode to the kitchen to start the kheer, dragging the phone and its cradle with her, its long cord snaking behind her. Ibrahim and Son’s number was written on a sticky note attached to the fridge. She dialed the digits and stuck the phone under the ear, freeing her hands to chop the waiting mound of almonds.

Mr. Ibrahim picked up the phone and exchanged salam’s with the butcher. They inquired after the health of each other’s families and discussed the burgeoning Nashville halal poultry business until she shifted the conversation, to ask about an order of a single cut up chicken that she’d made on behalf of her daughter, via voicemail, the week prior.

“I think there was some sort of misunderstanding. You see, she received 42 pounds of whole chicken from your shop, just this morning,” she said.

“That’s impossible,” Mr. Ibrahim said. “I shut down the shop a month ago. We’re on vacation in New Jersey through August, with my wife’s mother.”

Mrs. Abdul Raheem dropped her knife, brushing slivers of nuts to the ground. She bent down to sweep them into her palm. “There’s no employees in the store, then? No orders being filled?”

“None. It must have been some other shop. Though, isn’t your daughter — what’s the word, no meat, no milk, no desi food —”

“Vegan.” She said it derisively, but there was a note of pride in her voice. “And she eats our food,” she added quickly.

“So, she’s left Pakistan behind for good then,” he snorted. “Ridiculous, how this country turns perfectly good Pakistani children into American rabbits.”

Mrs. Abdul Raheem stiffened. It was one thing for her to belittle her daughter, but quite another thing for the butcher to do it too.

“No,” she said. “We were the ones who left the homeland behind. Wish Auntie well for me.” She hung up the phone and took out the mortar and pestle and started to grind the cardamom pods.

When Kainat was a little girl, she’d bought her her own mini mortar and pestle. She’d shown her how to pick the most pungent cumin and black pepper from the spice jars. Mother and daughter would sit cross legged on the ground, stone in hand, beating staccato thumps and lateral grinds. Mrs. Abdul Raheem would sing old songs her own mother had sung to her, when she was a child, once they got into a good rhythm. Kainat would howl in response in nonsense Urdu, her best imitation of the sounds coming from her mother’s mouth.

Mrs. Abdul Raheem smiled at the memory, scraping the powdered spices into the pan. She finished chopping the almonds and added them, along with the vermicelli, to the saffron and cardamom browning on the stovetop. It was her favorite step of making kheer — the smell, woody and sweet, brought her back to her own mother’s kitchen on Eid morning, she and her sisters sampling bites of the hot pudding off the stove before morning prayers from their mother’s spoon.

She checked on the bubbling pot of milk next to the nuts and noodles. She watched it for a moment, then moved it to the sink and fetched a container of almond milk from the pantry. She took out a clean pot, poured in the runny white liquid with a scrunched-up nose, and turned up the heat. It was for an emergency, the almond milk, a substitute only to be employed if Kainat outright rejected kheer with *real* milk. But something about the conversation with Mr. Ibrahim prodded her to make the adjustment anyways. She’d seen bits of her own harsh disposition towards her daughter reflected in his condemnation, and it was a disconcerting realization.

She watched the almond milk reduce to a gelatinous semi-liquid, a thin film of skin forming on its surface. It was so fragile, she thought. She could probably pierce it with her breath. She wondered if there was there some non-minor trauma she’d missed in Kainat’s childhood that had culminated in her present breakdowns. A particularly cruel childhood bully, a Quran tutor liberal with the ruler on her knuckles, perhaps. She added a generous cup of rose water to the kheer and put the lid on to let it simmer.

But maybe it had all begun even earlier, three decades ago, when Mrs. Abdul Raheem had crossed the Atlantic Ocean, Kainat a bean in her belly, the both of them trusting a hunk of flying metal to take them to this godless, memory-less land.

The kheer was starting to burn. She took the pot off the stove and stuck it into the fridge. Above the freezer sat Kainat’s old mortar and pestle sitting above the freezer, gathering dust and pennies.

The Holiday Inn wouldn’t give Kainat freezer space, but they did give her a cleaver. They’d been very sorry to turn down her request to store the bag of carcasses, perhaps even slightly nervous, but it was strictly against health code to store guests’ meat in the freezer. Kainat moved to plan two, wrapping the shower cap around her ears and nose. She dragged the ironing board into the bathroom, centered a chunk of chicken on it, and started sloughing its skin onto the floor with her fingers. The stench crept through her makeshift mask.

Fat slipped onto the floor in globs after the skinning, baring the meat underneath. She heaved her body back and forth, back and forth over the knife, tearing apart ligaments



from flesh, tossing feathers into the trashcan. Feet a fulcrum on the reddening floor, she hummed to the rhythm of her body's motion, an old tune she'd often heard mother sing. She couldn't remember the words. The big mound of meat shrunk, and smaller piles multiplied around it, two, four, eight, sixteen, and then she wrapped each of them up in plastic laundry bags she'd filched from the janitorial closet, double bagging as she went. She crammed the chicken legs into the mini-fridge hidden in the TV cabinet, too distasteful an item to display in the open room. The parts that wouldn't fit she piled back in the tub, cooling them with cans of chilled beers and sugary drinks from the fridge. An inexplicable urge to repeat the verses she'd memorized this morning surged up her throat, but she stifled it by cracking open a beer for herself, filled with the gleeful joy of someone deriving pleasure from doing the forbidden more than from the forbidden item itself. She lay down on the tiled floor and traced the blood that had pooled in the grout with her pinky finger.

Despite growing up in Charlevoix, that religious melting pot of dedicated Lutherans, Methods, Baptists, and one and a half dozen Muslim families, Kainat did not fully identify as a practicing Muslim. Historically, her relationship with religion was concerned with the differences between her parents' rules and those of her post-reformation-minded peers. There were so many that she couldn't explain to herself, or to them, if they asked (and they often did). No pepperoni pizzas at birthday parties, no shorts in gym class, no entering the masjid with your left foot first.

The worst rules were the unjust ones, like that boys got to pray up front while girls had to stay in the back. For this one Auntie Khadija had offered a hushed explanation in Class 6: Boys your age would find ladies' rears distracting. Well, why should the burden be on her to resist the temptation of ogling Muhammad Elias's fine backside during Friday prayers, instead of the other way around? After that comment, Auntie Khadija had made her pray behind the barrier they'd set up for the one Wahabi family in town, whose wife would only pray behind a doubled veil. But the wall had been designed to curb the men's gaze, and not the other way around, so if anything, Auntie Khadija only enabled Kainat's pre-pubescent forays into objectification of the male booty for that month. Unsurprisingly, Kainat had stopped praying in Arabic as soon as she'd graduated from Charlevoix Islamic Sunday School eight years ago, until she'd encountered the Abraham verse that morning.

Kainat's forehead sheened from concentration. She would not fall into another stupid daze, nor let her lips start to move of their own accord. She wiped her face with her fingers, mingling salty sweat with salty blood. She held her palm up to her mouth and licked it delicately. She couldn't resist the memory imbued in its taste. Sodium soup.

As it turned out, as Kainat had gotten older, it was not Muhammad Elias from the mosque but Emily Nguyen from AP chem who started to catch her attention. Dating was two of the four forbidden D's for the Muslim American teenager, which were, in order, dating, drinking, drugs, and dating again for good measure. But during Ramadan evenings, Kainat's parents were too busy cramming the recitation of the entire Quran in prayer to enforce the usual rules. Technically Kainat's presence in the mosque was expected too — unless she was menstruating. It was maybe the sole perk of getting her period.

So Kainat got to stay in the unsupervised lobby, providing ample unsupervised time to try all four D's. After Emily Nguyen demonstrated reciprocal attention during fourth period AP lit, on a half-mooned summer night, she snuck out of the mosque to do decidedly less Allah-approved activities in the backseat of Emily's dad's jeep.

They'd parked behind Fern's liquor shop, on the opposite end of the strip mall from the masjid. It was kind of fuzzy in her head, what with the summer heat, the echoes of the imam's takbeer's from across the street cutting up the Sleater-Kinney mixtape Emily had chosen for the evening, their two bodies cleaving in the dark. But she clearly remembered Emily's hands afterwards. Slick and red with sin. She'd tried to apologize in teenage stutters, and Emily had smiled and said that she didn't mind. She was a girl too, after all.

I'm just so embarrassed, Kainat replied, hiding her face. Then Emily had brought her finger to her tongue and licked, looking right into Kainat's eyes. *There, now we're even*, she said. *You watched me drink sodium soup, so we each have something on each other.*

That was the moment Kainat had decided that Allah must be a She.

If there is an Allah, Kainat reminded herself, staring up at the Kalamazoo Inn's ceiling. Her head started to swell in waves, following the patterns on the tiles.

Mrs. Abdul Raheem stood at the sink, filling the vat she'd used to boil the milk for the kheer with water. She was thinking about home. Not Charlevoix, not Lahore, but Amritsar, the Indian city of her ancestors, pre-Partition days. Mrs. Abdul Raheem had never been herself — she was born after the trains transported their passengers, dead and alive, across the country, cutting open wounds across the newly parted lands. But when she was a child, she'd been told so many stories that she could still almost visualize it. The three-story complex, the open courtyard in the center, the banyan tree wrapped with ribbons by hundreds of generations of her father's family. Once, her dadi had told her wistfully, hunched over the kitchen stove, *we wouldn't leave the house, because everything we needed and loved was in there.*

By we, Mrs. Abdul Raheem had known, her grandmother meant, *we women.* She remembered the typical sadness that welled up in her body whenever dadi spoke of Amritsar was, this time, tinged with a guilty relief. Imagine, not being able to leave home!

This, Mrs. Abdul Raheem knew, was part of any migration's aftermath. One might ache for a place that used to home, but at the same time, their children will reject it. She looked down at her wet hands, her dadi's hands. The heart lines crossing their palms were the same length. Kainat's, too.

When her daughter called, she waited a full four rings before picking it up.

"The meat wasn't from Mr. Ibrahim," Mrs. Abdul Raheem said.

Kainat mumbled something unintelligible.

"His shop's been closed for a month. And since we actually have no idea where it came from, you should probably toss it out, I'm thinking" she continued.

Kainat kept mumbling.

"Is — is that a verse from the *Quran*, Kainat?" Mrs. Abdul Raheem gasped.

"Ammi," her daughter said. She was using her I-have-something-to-say voice, of her petulant teenage years. "I'm not going to eat your kheer when I get home. But it's not because I don't like it, or you, or Pakistani food, ok? I just — I'm figuring out what I believe, and sometimes it's not the same as what you do."

"OK."

"OK?"

"Ok, but I did make you almond milk kheer."

Kainat went quiet for a moment. Then, she asked cautiously, "What changed your mind?"

"In a new place," she said, "I think there are new rules. And maybe, you choose to live by theirs — some of theirs, at least — instead of ours. It's ok. Just don't forget where you came from."

"But why do I have to choose, Ammi?" Kainat said quietly. She hung up the phone.

Mrs. Abdul Raheem stood at the sink and tried to figure out where the conversation had gone wrong. Mothers and daughters will never fully agree, she told herself. It's the nature of things. She sighed.

There was a moment she returned to frequently, when being in the present gave her a headache. A time before she was anyone's mother. She watched it as a movie unfolding before her eyes: sitting by an intimate friend in the main projection room of the Lahore Grammar School, waiting for the changeover cue, their faces pressed so close against the glass that she could feel her friend's breath on her cheek, the heat of her body. The name of the picture eluded her, and she was starting to lose the friend's face too, but she could never forget the few seconds between cue marks the two of them stayed there, in heart-aching stillness. An eternally looping film.

It was a *really* stupid story, Kai reminded herself, still lying on the bathroom floor, spinning in and out of consciousness. Why did a bunch of birds have to suffer mutilation just to show a prophet who should know better that God was the real deal, like some poor poultry Christs? Besides, that wasn't how belief worked in the real world, a switch flipped by a single unlikely event: unbeliever to Muslim, kafir to beloved by God.

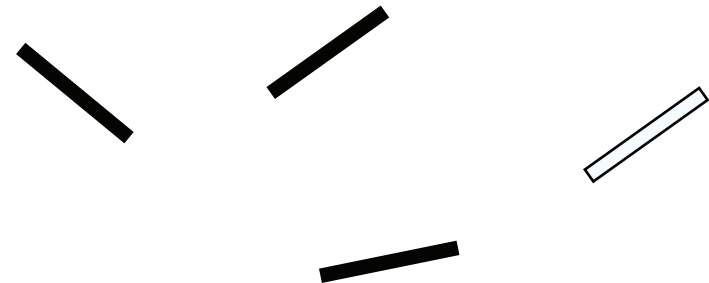
But Kainat was struck by one detail, likely unintentional, considering she'd read a translation: the double usage of cleave. To force apart and to come together. The more she thought about it, the more it intrigued her, that sloughing apart a body could also become the re-joining of two things torn apart.

She looked at the meat, then up to where she imagined God might be watching in the bathroom ceiling tiles. She cupped her hands and said a prayer — a question, really — into her cupped hands: "Oh God, what do I do with this meat?" She drifted into a soft, dazed sleep.

Kainat awoke from her stupor to a rage of chirps. Besides her, the tub lay glinting and empty. She leapt off the floor into the hotel room to find birds, dozens of birds, ugly city pigeons and drab ducks and glinting crows shrouding the bathroom in dark wings and beady eyes. Almost all of the birds held hunks of red and pink chicken thighs in their beaks; a dozen battled each other over a few breasts on her bed. A couple more intelligent creatures had figured out how to open the fridge, and legs were spilling out of the bags she'd neatly knotted shut.

Even worse were the droppings. White splatters on the walls, the carpet, the television — cannibalism must have been a laxative for the aviary digestive system. Her pajamas, which she'd neatly folded next to the pillow, were splayed on the ground and crusted with stool. The room reeked of rotting meat and digested rotting meat. This was not the miracle she'd been promised.

She saw the window then, cast ajar, morning sun starting to swath the carnage in gold. A single feather was wedged between the window and the sill, too white for the blood-bath around her. She walked to the window, stuck her hand into the opening, and tugged it out gently. She blew on its bristles. She grinned as they stiffened in the light.





Untitled

Mimansa Dogra

1.

my body tethered / one string attached
one end to / tight diaphragm / one end goes / into the ground
old and hollow / center of earth / the tension /
curves my spine into a C / fetal / calcified

2.

I refuse to consume / I refuse to discard / I, perfect static equilibrium
pull candyfloss memory from / between my legs / back of my throat
over knees / over tongue / spin strands around my finger
close my lips / around the tip
suck / gag
matted wool / heave
swallow the bile / it comes up / swallow the bile / it comes up
between my thighs / between my lips
bleed / cough / ripe / harvest / eat /

3.

born / cord cut / navel raw / grandfather / stooped over / cleaned
my matted hair
/ whispered five words /



The Archaeology of My Cousin

Vivian Lei

If I could excavate his sadness
like the long keel of a Diplodocus,

dust the ashes of his favorite toys:
three beetles, mosses, small twigs

he used to put behind his ears, the
things buried with him still smell

like tears. If I could inspect each
bone / recover those decomposed

joints / let the scratches on his eye
sockets bring me back to the comet

night. What a spectacle when light
cracked the sky open. He said what a

relief when this pain ceased to be
the necessity for growth. If I could

borrow his child feet to trace back
the steps he had walked, if I could

bring him chocolate again like a late,
late apology, I would've understood

why the kid who sat at the corner
had grown more and more silent

when he stared into a blank future.



Nuclear

Dhaea Kang

(Originally appeared in *So to Speak: a feminist journal of language & arts*)

My sister's arrest was the biggest scandal to hit our town since the high school principal, Dr. Krauss, was caught with a DUI during my senior year and had his mugshot printed on the cover of the Sunwood High Class of 1993 yearbook.

It started with a phone call.

"Sahna-ya! Phone!" Umma called from the kitchen.

I never thought I'd be one of those kids who returned to the empty nest after college, but after almost a year, I had to admit I was no longer "in between leases" and officially moved back in.

"Just hang up!" I called back from my room. I'd finally gotten around to clearing out my childhood closet to make room for my current wardrobe. Usually when Umma passed me a phone call, it was a telemarketer trying to sell insurance or a scammer congratulating us for having won tickets to a luxury cruise in the Carribean.

Umma was at my door now, a trembling hand covering her mouth. "Sahna, it's the school."

"Are you sure?" I'd played amateur interpreter for my parents enough times to know that scammers claimed all sorts of identities—but the school was a new one. Maybe it was one of those calls from the alumni association that harassed former students for donations.

She nodded, focusing on the mess of clothes on my floor. "Something happened to Mina."

It was as if a giant rock had lodged itself in my diaphragm. I couldn't think of a single situation, aside from an emergency, where a college would phone home. I took my time folding one last T-shirt before rising. I dragged my feet, attempting to stretch out the ten paces it normally took to get from my bedroom door to the kitchen phone. Somehow, I knew that this was *the phone call* that everyone talked about, the one that separated two eras of one's life into *before* and *after*.

The pot of seaweed soup on the stove was at a roiling boil. I switched off the gas. "Hello? This is Sahna Shin."

"This is Laura Berger, calling from the dean's office at Taft University. What is your relation to Mina Shin?"

"I'm her sister."

"Before I continue, I have to ask if you're over the age of eighteen."

"Yes. I am." I'd be turning twenty-three next month. I held my breath, bracing myself for the news. This was it—this was the moment.

"We have received notice that Ms. Shin has been taken into the custody of—" I exhaled, so distracted by the relief of hearing that Mina was alive that I missed the rest of the statement.

"I'm sorry. Can you repeat that?"

"Ms. Shin has been taken into the custody of the Fender County Jail."

I choked out a laugh. "What?" Had she been caught drinking? Smoking pot, maybe? During my freshman year at Taft, I'd been slapped with a two hundred dollar underage drinking ticket for drinking in my dorm—but I hadn't been arrested, and I'm positive if the school had notified my parents, I'd never have heard the end of it.

"There was an... incident... in the dorms. I suggest you try to make contact with the police as soon as possible."

"But what happened?"



"What is it? Is Mina okay?" Umma was still planted outside my bedroom door, as if coming any closer would trigger the worst-case scenario. I nodded and dialed the police station.

"Sahna-ya, tell me what's going on."

I put a finger to my lips and listened carefully to the voice on the other line.

"Sahna? What is it? Tell me now."

The line went silent, yet I couldn't bring myself to replace the receiver. After a few moments, the grating off-hook warning screeched from the phone and snapped me out of my shock.

"She was arrested. For murder."

Appa closed up early, something he'd done only once before in the fifteen years since we opened up the stationary store at the local strip. He plowed through the front door and kicked off his shoes. "What happened?"

"I don't know. The lady from school said something happened in the dorm. The police say she's suspected of murder."

"This must be a mistake. She's just a girl!"

I bit down on my thumb, a habit that had replaced my chronic nail biting.

"Call them back," he demanded. "Tell them that her father wants to speak to her."

"Appa, it doesn't work like that."

"Then how does it work?"

"I don't know."

"Call Mr. Chung," Umma said, referring to a fellow church member who was a lawyer. "Or Pastor Lee."

Appa shook his head. "Absolutely not. This is a family matter. No need to get anyone involved."

"Appa, are you serious?" He threw me a sharp glare, as he often did when I contradicted him. "This is going to be all over the news." I was right. Dr. K's DUI had nothing on Mina.

The only other time my parents closed the shop early was during my junior year of highschool. "Sahna Shin, your parents are here to excuse you from class," Ms. Haggerty's voice crackled over the intercom. Now *that* was a sentence I never thought I'd hear. Something extraordinary must have happened, considering they'd never let me miss out on school for anything. One time, in fifth grade, Umma chastised me for ruining my perfect attendance when the school nurse sent me home with a 102 degree fever.

"What's going on? Is everything okay?" I asked from the backseat. Neither of them spoke for the entire drive, though the fact that they seemed more annoyed than panicked alleviated my worry. It wasn't until we pulled into the parking lot of Sunwood Middle School that I gathered that Mina must have gotten into some kind of trouble, and I was being dragged along to play interpreter.

Ms. Nelson, who'd also worked the front desk when I was a student here, walked us to the school counselor's office. A surprisingly young woman sat behind the desk. Her plastic nameplate read *Ms. Grabowski*. On the wall beside her, there was a poster that had the words *Today I'm Feeling...* with a couple dozen pictures of cartoon faces the size of hockey pucks, each labeled with a corresponding emotion. *Today I'm Feeling...* I scanned the options on the poster but couldn't find one that quite fit what I was feeling.

"Hi. I'm Wendy," she said. "Please have a seat."

Appa grunted a hello, introduced himself as "Mr. Shin." He never introduced himself by his first name. Umma gave a nervous smile and nodded her head in greeting.

"I wanted to meet with you to discuss some concerns I have regarding Mina."

Umma and Appa both nodded.

"It was brought to my attention that Mina has been engaging in self-harm behavior. She's been observed aggressively scratching the same area of skin, often to the point of drawing blood."

Appa did nothing to hide his annoyance after I explained what Wendy had said. I could almost hear his thoughts. *I closed the shop for this?*

"She's always done that," Umma said, "Since she was a little girl. Picks her scabs, too. It makes her skin look so unsightly..." Wendy eyed me expectantly.

"She says that Mina's been doing that since she was little."

"It's not uncommon for youth who are suffering from feelings of depression and anxiety to engage in these behaviors to escape or alleviate these feelings."

She used words that were definitely not in my Korean vocabulary. "Umm.. seul-puh dae." She's sad.

"Sad? What does she have to be sad about?" Appa looked incredulous. Wendy turned towards me, her pencil-thin eyebrows furrowed.

"He wants to know why she's sad--I mean, depressed."

Wendy gave my parents a sympathetic smile. "I met with Mina the other day, and she seems to be getting along fine at school. I was wondering if there might be something going on at home."

Umma squeezed her purse to her chest and hissed, "Why is she asking us this?"

"I'm always available if Mina needs someone to talk to during the school day, but I highly recommend she see a therapist. It also wouldn't hurt to look into family therapy. I've seen it do wonders in these types of situations." My parents met her with a blank stare. Wendy's smile faltered. "I'm happy to give you a referral."

She selected a business card from a book on her desk and handed it to Appa. He studied it for a moment and shook his head. He handed the card back. "No English."

"Oh! Of course. And your preferred language is...?"

"Korean."

"Ah, yes. I see. Oh! I know just the person." She flipped through her collection of business cards. "Ah ha!" she said, handing Appa another card with a triumphant grin. She smiled expectantly, like a puppy waiting for a pat on the head for a job well done.

"Aish," he said, looking at the card. "It's Mrs. Cho." Mrs. Cho was one of the many gossip queens at their church. I wondered if all her juicy material came from these therapy sessions.

Appa ranted the entire drive back to the highschool. "What does a little scratching have anything to do with her schoolwork?"

I eyed the digital clock at the front of the car. 1:00 PM. I'd be leaving lunch and heading to study hall right now. "Do I have to go back to school? There's only two periods left anyway, and one of them's study hall. And I missed lunch." Appa gave a sharp sigh, and I didn't push any further.

"Sahna-ya, stop biting your nails. It's filthy." Umma eyed me through the rearview mirror.

I closed my eyes, and instinctively found myself playing a game Mina and I made up when we were kids. We'd shut our eyes for the duration of the car ride and try to guess its location, using our mental map of the neighborhood as our guide. "We're passing the playground!" "Library!" "Kimi's house?" My parents' role in the game was to confirm whether we guessed right.

Gas station. Libby's Bakery. The park district. Sunwood High. The car came to a stop. I opened my eyes, dreading the return to class at the end of the school day. Outside the window, I was met with the colorful images of a drive-thru menu. "What do you want?" Appa asked.

During dinner that night, Umma said, "Mina-ya, you are so beautiful. Now, if only you'd stop doing that to your skin, you could be Miss Korea!" I cringed, thinking of all the times the prospect of becoming "Miss Korea" was used to inspire us to become a more attractive and smarter version of ourselves. It wasn't uncommon for one of my aunts or uncles to pull me aside at Thanksgiving and say, "Sahna-ya, you have such a pretty face! If you just started to exercise a bit, you could be Miss Korea!" or "You have grown so beautiful! Now if you study hard and get into a good college, you could be Miss Korea!"

Mina rolled her eyes, which she had lined with thick black eyeliner, a battle Umma had recently given up on fighting. "I don't care."

"Why, you don't care?" Umma responded in English, mimicking Mina's annoyed tone. "I care."

"Umma, stop. Can we not do this?"

Umma began muttering under her breath, as she often did when we said or did something that bothered her. "...carried you for nine months, endured a horrible labor, slaving away everyday to make sure you have everything... and you don't care?"

It was on every news station by that evening. Excited news anchors announced various headlines as I flipped through the channels.

—“*College co-ed murders newborn.*”

—“*Body of newborn found in women’s dorm at Taft University. Student in custody.*”

—“*From straight-A’s to straight jacket. What made her snap?*”

Umma’s eyes were glued to the Korean subtitles that rapidly scrolled across the screen. A teenage girl wearing a yellow hoodie with TAFT emblazoned on the front began to speak. “I mean, of course we noticed, but we just thought it was like the freshman fifteen, you know?” The camera panned across the familiar grassy quad of my college campus, and a voiceover started: “The suspect was identified as 18-year-old Mina Shin---”

“No. No no no...” Umma’s face crumpled in horror.

“---a freshman resident of the dorm where the body of a newborn was found---”

“Baby? Whose baby?”

I didn’t bother to point out the obvious.

“Sahna-ya, do you think it could be--” Umma clasped her hand to her mouth.

“Mina is a good Christian girl. It wasn’t her baby--she’s not even married!” Appa reasoned, as if killing someone else’s baby was preferable to killing one’s own.

The phone calls started almost immediately. Appa raised the receiver to his ear, only to hang up a moment later. After the third call from a reporter, Appa slammed the receiver and tore the landline from the wall. The faint ringing of the cordless phone in their bedroom continued to wail.

Mina’s high school senior photo took over the screen. Jet-black hair parted down the middle, that lazy smirk she always had in photos, each earlobe dotted with a yin yang stud she’d taken from my old jewelry box. I walked to the TV, reached around the back and yanked the plug from the wall. Umma continued to stare at the screen, despite it showing nothing.

I thought back to the last time I’d seen Mina. She’d come home for winter break—that was what, three months ago? Was it possible she’d been pregnant that whole time and nobody noticed?

I flinched at the sound of the doorbell. Appa looked through the peephole and cautiously opened the front door just a crack. “Is this the Shin household? Are you Mina Shin’s father? Mr. Shin, can I get a statement regarding--” Appa slammed the door shut and locked the deadbolt.

“How do they know where we live?”

The doorbell rang repeatedly, muffled voices filtering through the walls. “Mr. and Mrs. Shin! I’m with the Sunwood Press. How do you feel about--” Appa pounded on the door from the inside and there was a precious moment of silence before the frenzy started up again.

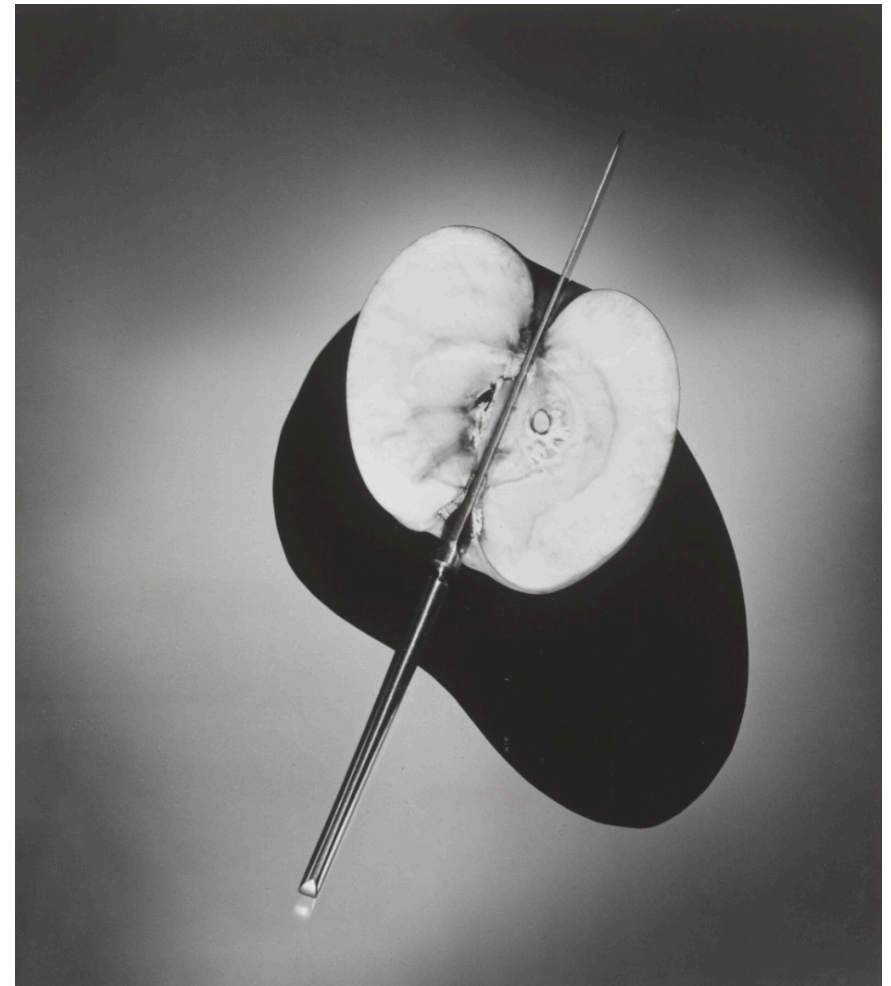
Umma dropped her head into her hands. “How can this be happening? How? How?”

“We need to call a lawyer. Call Mr. Chung or... somebody,” I said. Appa narrowed his eyes and crossed his arms, the defiant look of a child refusing to clean up his mess.

“Why didn’t she tell us?” Umma continued. “How could she have kept this to herself?”

I recalled the countless times I’d overheard Umma’s one-sided phone conversations with someone from her church:

—“Living together? And they’re not married?”



—“Did you hear Mrs. Bae’s eldest dropped out of school? All that work raising a child for nothing.”

—“Did you see? The youngest Jang girl came home from college with a nose piercing!”

—“A tattoo?”

I imagined the phone conversations that were surely happening at that moment. “Did you hear about the younger Shin girl? Murdering her child--that she had out of wedlock, no less. My Yumi would never find herself in that situation...”

As the knocks continued, Appa brought his hands to his face and covered his eyes with the heel of his palms as if he were counting down for a game of hide-and-seek. I was frozen in place, uncertain as to whether I should brace myself for an explosion.

When he revealed himself again, he resembled an old photo from his mandatory military service days—shoulders back, face set with an impenetrable stoicism.

His proud demeanor faltered after I went down the list of attorneys, calling each

His proud demeanor faltered after I went down the list of attorneys, calling each one (except Chung & Associates, of course). Who knew there were so many different kinds of lawyers? Only two of the listings took on felony criminal cases.

“Two hundred an hour?”

“And a five thousand dollar retainer,” I added.

“What about the other one?”

I’d purposely given him the cheaper of the two options first. “Two fifty an hour. Five thousand for the retainer.”

Appa shook his head in disbelief.

I didn’t mention what else the man on the last call had told me. “Between you and me, no one in this area is going to touch this case with a ten foot pole. Your sister is better off taking a plea deal--trust me on this one. She can apply for a public defender if money’s an issue. Good luck.”

“There’s the money we’ve been saving for her tuition,” Umma said.

“No. She still needs that.”

“Appa, I really don’t think school should be the top priority right now.”

He shot me a look that said we would not be touching the tuition money. “What about the wedding fund?”

“What wedding fund?” I asked.

Umma looked down to her lap. “We have five grand saved for when each of you get married.”

“What?” I asked, my grip tightening around the cordless receiver. My hands shook as I suppressed the urge to toss it across the room. “Neither of us are getting married anytime soon. Let’s use it for a lawyer!”

“No no no...” Umma said, waving a dismissive hand. “It’s only for your wedding.”

“I don’t even have a boyfriend! And how is Mina going to marry if she’s in prison?”

Umma refused to meet my gaze, but didn’t waver.

“What if I asked for more hours at work?” I’d been working part-time at the same daycare I’d worked during my summers in highschool. I was sure Darcy would let me take on extra shifts.

“Sahna-ya, isn’t it about time you apply for a real job? Appa and I didn’t put you through college so you could watch other people’s kids.”

Her words stung like a slap in the face. I tossed the phone on the sofa and walked out of the room before my frustration could switch from a leak to an outburst.

“Is there a family history of depression?”

I shrugged. “Maybe. Probably.” It was my senior year of college, and I had finally managed to make an appointment with the student counseling center after months of liberation.

The therapist, Patrick, had one of those baby faces that could’ve allowed him to pass for a seventeen-year-old, if it weren’t for the perfectly trimmed beard he kept. He repeatedly tapped a pen on his notepad in even intervals, like a human metronome.

He lifted an eyebrow, prompting me to elaborate. *Tap tap tap tap.*

“We don’t really talk about that kind of stuff. I don’t know. My parents aren’t going to find out I came here, are they?”

“Not unless you tell them. As I said before, anything you say in these sessions will remain confidential unless I have reason to believe you are a danger to yourself or others.”

I told him about sleeping past my alarm and missing lectures, and not just the ones in the morning, and how I couldn’t bring myself to respond to messages my friends left me, even if it was to decline an invitation out.

Patrick determined that I was experiencing a major depressive episode. His nonchalance about the diagnosis was oddly touching. Hot tears began to sting my eyes.

“I recommend we continue to meet at least weekly for starters. How do you feel about going on medication?” he asked.

“I’m not sure.”

“Give it a thought. We can discuss it next week.”

There was a letter waiting for me when I returned home.

Dear Ms. Shin,

This letter is to inform you of your dismissal from Taft University. Your student enrollment will be terminated at the end of the current academic quarter. This decision was made due to your failure to meet the terms of your academic probation, which required you to maintain at least a 2.0 GPA.

I told Patrick about the letter at our next meeting.

For once, his pen-tapping ceased. He clutched his chin, as if trying to keep his jaw from dropping open. “Oh, wow. I’m sorry to hear that. How do you feel about it?”

My mind went to the *Today I Feel...* poster from Mina’s guidance counselor’s room. Indifferent? Exhausted? Relieved? Panicked? “I don’t know. Not great.”

“Unfortunately, I won’t be able to keep working with you if you’re no longer enrolled as a student. I can give you some referrals to therapists in the area who are not affiliated with the university—are you planning on relocating?”

I rode the lease out at my apartment through the rest of the school year, spending my days watching talk show marathons and evenings watching whatever else was on, cashing the check my parents sent for school expenses to pay for rent and late-night delivery. At the end of May, instead of celebrating with the Class of 1997, I packed my things and drove back to Sunwood, where my parents met me with icy stares and a barrage of grievances for having skipped out on my graduation ceremony. Thankfully, things began to simmer down as they prepared to see Mina off to college.

There was one other time, aside from the awkward meeting with Wendy the guidance counselor, when Appa picked me up early from school. I was in kindergarten, though, which didn’t really count. As Appa strapped me into my booster seat, I spied the empty car seat beside me.

“Where’s baby?” I asked.

“Still at the hospital. We’re going to see her now.”

She was lying in a clear plastic bassinet, which looked oddly similar to the sand table in my classroom. The fine ends of her black hair peeked out from the white beanie she sported on her head, and the rest of her was bundled up in a way that made her look like a cocoon. Umma was dozing in the hospital bed beside her.

I crouched to peer through the transparent wall of the bassinet, the baby at eye level.

“My dong-seng?” I asked. My little sister?

Appa nodded. “Her name is Mina. Say ‘hi, Mina.’”

“Hi, Mina!” I bellowed. Mina scrunched up her face and smacked her mouth, then settled back to stillness, eyes shut. “Why won’t she talk to me?”

“She’s just a baby,” Appa said with a *Shhhh*. “Don’t worry, pretty soon you’re going to be begging her to leave you alone.”

When we brought Mina home, I quickly learned to tiptoe around her like a ticking time bomb. “Shhhh, Mina’s sleeping,” Umma would say, turning down the volume on my cartoon so low that it might as well have been on mute. Then we’d pause and listen carefully for the sound of her wailing, as if even the silence might cause her to detonate.

We each had our own room, with our beds pushed up against the opposite sides of the same wall. Where there was once a crib, was now a twin bed with a moon-patterned comforter, fenced in by the floral wallpapered walls Mina had once begged to paint over in blue. A dozen teddy bears of various sizes and colors were piled on top, childhood relics she had chosen to leave behind.

The house was quiet now. The reporters had packed up and gone, the landline still left dangling from the wall, the TV remained unplugged, and the cordless was due for a charge. I waited to hear any sound at all—the hiss of the gas stove as Umma reheated the seaweed soup, Appa’s restless pacing as he considered what to do next—hell, I’d even welcome anguished cries or heated bickering about who was to blame. But in the aftermath of the final breath of one of our own, there was only silence.



When the Snow Comes, Consider Family

Serin Lee

The first word that bubbles up is champagne.
“Pretty is as pretty does”—I liked the sound
that sparkling made. Other times
we were very civil, did not disturb one another.
The leaves in his shadow come now
and are gone—shot through
with orange, lost to the month’s material.
One day I hope to wear them, so light
I will not know I have them on. It is cold
because we are waiting on narrative.
Contract your muscles and hold them
to the task of taking inventory; otherwise,
the day outpaces time. “Magpie beauty”
sweeps a whole house, shelters the every day.
I could not love the automatic women,
though I tried. But the shape of their waiting
is a hand that gives and a hand that receives,
one turning over the other in thinning light.
To turn over the onions, too, and have them be
roses or the cerebral sky. From their cards
I cannot know when there will next
be flowers, but take off your clothes
to better smell the lavender. Consider
the hour as it whitens, and its green ray—
to cry about nothing is not nothing.
We are prescribed something simpler: memory,
the world in eight days, and painted windows—all unfolding
onto the sidewalk, delicately undecided
like pavement blossoms after rain. The light changes:
it is midwinter; it is time for me to go. Father has
taken the picture, and whichever
page you open, there you are.



Meet the Writers

Shreya is a recent graduate of the University of Chicago and currently works as a first grade teacher. She enjoys writing poetry and nonfiction about family, being Indian-American, and having crushes.

Bofan Zhang has a Chinese pen name, Wuliao, because he was bored by his real name. He comes from Beijing, from an apartment near a toll station by the Great 5th Ring Road. In 2019, he started a WeChat official account, Peking Bastard, with other global citizens. Although his major contribution to the platform is its cover page selection, in the same year, he was named by others in the group as “the Best WeChat Poster of the Year,” for he has “single-handedly revolutionized the way people post and voyeur.” On May 4th, 2020, he joined Never New Teens underground literature group and became one of the co-founders of Neiwubu St. school of thought. You will find him busy translating his WeChat posts into English in his free time.

Tehzeeb Usmani writes from Michigan and Chicago. She lives in Hyde Park with her flatmates, books, and plants.

Mimansa Dogra is a researcher at the University of Chicago. In her spare time, she writes poetry and enjoys podcasting and radio work.

Vivian Lei is currently pursuing her BA degree in English Literature at the University of Chicago. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music and talking to her cat Godot.

Dhaea Kang is a singer-songwriter and fiction writer from Chicago, IL. Her stories have appeared in Lunch Ticket, So to Speak Journal, The Grief Diaries, and Passengers Journal.

Meet the Editors

Amélie Ng Pavel is a writer and bookseller based in Chicago. A graduate of the University of Chicago, she is the founder of the Chicago Asian Writers Workshop. When she's not reading or writing, she can be found walking her dog, crocheting, or tending to her house plants.

Serin Lee is a fourth-year student at the University of Chicago majoring in English and Creative Writing. Having spent her time evenly between Iowa City and Seoul, she is interested in poetry, translation, and image-text relations in situations of human displacement and mobility. She is also interested in film and can often be found projecting celluloid at Doc Films, the university's student-run film society.



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