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How to Build a Better Body: Stories

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Asian American Studies

by

Laura Chow Reeve

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

How to Build a Better Body: Stories

by

Laura Chow Reeve

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, Chair

How to Build a Better Body is a collection of four short stories that explores intimacies of the queer mixed-race body through magical, speculative, and fabulist forms—or weirdness. Each of the stories—“1,000-Year-Old Ghosts,” “Real Bodies,” “A Slow Connection,” and “Hunted”—interrogates the complexities of mixed race tropes such as the promise of a post-racial future and the intersections of a queer and mixed race identity. The project as a whole is interested in the interaction between creative and scholarly work, and what possibilities weird or non-normative forms and genres create.

The thesis of Laura Chow Reeve is approved.

Victor Bascara

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns

Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

Dedicated to our mothers,
particularly mine.

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INTRODUCTION

A lot of time in graduate school is taken up by critique; breaking things down, unraveling them, unpacking what they carry. In my own writing and reading, I was investigating mixed race bodies and interracial relationships, and it started to feel almost too painful to bear. I had gone back to school in order to break down, unravel, and unpack, but those processes by themselves were wearing down on my emotions. Only in the middle of my first year, I felt raw and exhausted. As it turned out, confronting hurt feelings and anxieties was no easier in the space of the classroom or a works cited page. I eventually found places and methods in which I could build: personal relationships, a creative writing group for writers of color on campus, and my own creative project. As Lisa Lowe argues in “The Power of Culture,” it is in culture that “that alternative forms of subjectivity, collectivity, and practice are imagined,” and it is within my creative work that I have found a space not solely dependent upon critique, but a space of imagining and building (16). Once I started to use creative writing to engage critical theory and analytical writing, it became less daunting; I folded it into my creative process and found inspiration and motivation to finish this project.

My thesis is a collection of four short stories that explores intimacies of the queer mixed race body through alternative magical, speculative and fabulist forms or weirdness. When I use the word “intimacies,” I’m thinking about the personal ways we interact with our own bodies both in public and private spaces, and how the public and private shape not only our relationship to our bodies but also our physical bodies themselves. I also use the word intimacies to allude to relationships (physical and emotional) that both create and desire mixed race bodies. In addition, I want to implicate as intimate social systems (gender, race and sexuality) and the subsequent violence of those systems (heteropatriarchy, white supremacy and colonialism). While it is

important to remember that such violence is structural, it is equally valuable to understand the ways in which these structures shape our bodies, memories, and desires, and impact the ways we have sex, give birth, and build family.

Lisa Lowe's use of intimacies "Intimacies of Four Continents" is particularly useful when grappling with my own. Lowe uses intimacies in three interconnected ways in order to interrogate modern liberal humanism and racialized divisions of labor in the nineteenth century. In her work, Lowe reads intimacies "against the grain" and sees it as meaning "spatial proximity or adjacent connection;" privacy, both what Ann Laura Stoler calls the "intimacies of empire" and the ways in which bourgeois privacy is used to discipline the enslaved and colonized seeking "to indoctrinate the newly freed into forms of Christian marriage and family;" and the unspoken intimacies "embodied in the variety of contacts among slaves, indentured persons, and mixed-blood free peoples living together" ("Intimacies" 193, 195, 203). Lowe's reading of personal and individual intimacies to that of the four continents opens up space to think of intimacy beyond the affective, sexual, and domestic. In addition, the intimacies that Lowe names impact and shape the contemporary mixed race body.

It is through weirdness that I try to make sense of these intimacies. I use weirdness to signal a space of queerness and rejection of normativity. In this collection, I embrace weirdness as a site of alternative possibilities in which even the rigidity of margins can be blurred and broken down. It is in weirdness and queerness that my characters find possibilities of, if not wholeness, a place to assemble the pieces of themselves into something that resists the structures that fractured them in the first place. Whether it be in the pickling of memories or dystopic futures, each of my stories is weird. And even if every character is not queer, though many of

them are, the forms are queer, the desires are queer, and even the reader is positioned as queer when engaging with how my stories disrupt normativity.

The stories in this collection came out of my time in a very academic-focused program and were often influenced by my coursework; over the past two years I've engaged with texts from fields such as ethnic studies, gender studies, cultural studies, literature, sociology, anthropology and history. Not only is my work in conversation with interdisciplinary research, but it also creates a bridge between my academic and creative interests. However, I wonder if the frame of interdisciplinarity is enough. I also want to name my work as what poet Kazim Ali calls "genre-queer." Ali writes, "Perhaps the genre-defying writer is a queer one, who understands gender and genre derive from the same classifying, categorizing impulse – the impulse not to invent but consume, commodify, *own*" (28-29, emphasis Ali). I use *queer* genres and forms as a way to defy both academic and creative classification. A genre-queer methodology is particularly useful for my work when thinking about the ways in which mixed race bodies are interrogated, classified, and marked in casual interactions between strangers or on government forms such as the census.

Mixed race subjectivities, histories, and experiences have been explored, researched, and governed in a wide variety of genres, disciplines, and forms. Legal decisions and government records, academic scholarship, activist and movement writings, novels, comics and visual artwork all shape mixed race discourse. One prominent collection on mixed race discourse in Asian American Studies is Laura Kina's and Wei Ming Dariotis' anthology, *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art*. The book places itself within a Critical Mixed Race Studies framework that Kina and Dariotis describe through a metaphor of "fenestrated capillaries" – blood flowing through many tiny veins, like diverging and converging streams, but

veins in which there are windows, providing opportunities to take advantage of multiple and shifting perspectives” (6). They argue that this approach allows for a multicentered perspective, and that its bloodline intersects with the bloodlines of ethnic studies, gender studies, queer, postcolonial and critical race theory. Kina and Dariotis also argue that this metaphor is more fluid and multidirectional than the commonly used idea of “mixed roots” because “it connotes the focus on blood and embodiment in historical discourse of mixed race identity;” they also argue that the idea of “fenestrated” capillaries allows for a simultaneous and multidirectional approach of looking through windows rather than a single lens (6).

With these frameworks and approaches in mind, this next section will look at how the mixed race histories and subjectivities have been discussed, explored, and shaped within the realms of literature and literary scholarship, legal discourse, activist writings, and science fiction.

Mixed Race Discourse in Literature

Within literary traditions, the mixed race figure was often seen as horrific and tragic. In the epilogue of Caroline Rody’s *The Interethnic Imagination: Roots and Passages in Contemporary Asian American Fiction* titled “Mixed Races, Mixed Children, Mixed Outcomes,” Rody argues, “mixed race characters have long had a special place in literature. Their very existence bespeaking a backstory that is at the least anti-conventional, and often redolent of intrigue and taboo, they seem to embody what is most compellingly narratable and readable in a literary plot” (146). Mixed race characters have fascinated both writers and readers because of what they have come to represent. Mixed race characters, particularly those of African and European American descent, are weighed down by symbolism, particularly that of the “tragic mulatto” figure. Rody argues that historically, being mixed race was seen as horrifying. The term

“mulatto” comes from “mule,” an animal created by two different species; mixed race people were seen as non-human or monstrous. There is a history, particularly in literature, of the tragic mulatto figure so unable to cope with their inability to pass or fit into either black or white society that they meet an untimely and tragic end. Thus, Rody explains, “an extensive, elaborate history of anti-miscegenation laws attempted to erect a bulwark against such births” (146). Mixed race individuals were seen as so horrifying that it was deemed they should not even exist.

However, Rody then traces “the massive shift both in law and cultural attitudes toward interracial mixing over the course of the twentieth century, propelled by the mid-century movement for African American civil rights, and by the subsequent era of ethnic identity politics” (146). This shift is also commented on in the introduction of Kina’s and Dariotis’ anthology, *War Baby/Love Child*. The authors unpack the “love child” figure and how it was once connected to “stereotypes of tragic mulattoes, tragic mixed breeds, tragic mestizos, and tragic Eurasians,” is now thought positively as a “racial savior” and evidence of the end of racism (Kina and Dariotis 10). Thus, this historical and cultural shift not only became positive, but miscegenation and the mixed race child became something of a necessity. While before the mixed race figure was seen as sneaky, sinister, and black blood that tainted white bodies, it soon came to symbolize racial harmoniousness and even the possibility of a post-racial society. This shift is not necessarily entirely positive and masks continued white supremacist structures of violence.

Due to this binaristic shift from the tragic and horrific mixed race body to its post-racial celebration, literary scholars have had to come up with new ways of addressing mixed race subjectivities in literature. In *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture*, Jennifer Ann Ho uses ambiguity as a theoretical framework to understand the “slipperiness” of race in order to

denaturalize racialization and reveal it as process tied to structures of power (4-5). She argues that “racial ambiguity resists both the rhetoric of colorblindness as well as essentialism” and uses this analytic in her study on racially ambiguous Asian American subjects to demonstrate how this ambiguity complicates understandings of ancestry, genetic inheritance, family formations, bodies, genetic and racial categories, and authorship (Ho 5). The text undermines and questions the very notion of race as a category, and Ho sees ambiguity, “the sense of being open to multiple interpretations,” as a way to talk about race and mixed race issues without further reinforcing the categorization of race or the alternative of ignoring explorations of race all together (Ho 11). *Racial Ambiguity* challenges the colorblind rhetoric that is often accompanied by “Asian Americans who are racially ambiguous” such as popular mixed race figures like Tiger Woods and instead reads defiance in these narratives through close analysis (Ho 18).

In “Feeling Ancestral: Memory and Postracial Sensibility in Mixed-Race Asian American Literature,” Jeffery Santa Ana looks at Asian American literature featuring mixed-race characters. He argues that the multiracial consciousness ascribed to these characters refute and contradict “neoliberalism’s politics of color blindness underpinning our modern capitalist system” (Santa Ana 174). The feelings of shame, melancholia, and pain affirm the relevance and continued importance of race and racism despite rhetoric that claims we are now in a postracial era. Santa Ana uses the process of “feeling ancestral” to describe the tension between “a politics of color blindness in neoliberalism and, on the other, cultural memory in the empathic and often painful identification with heritage and genealogy” (Santa Ana 175). Thus, feeling ancestral is used to describe the memory of painful histories and ancestral origins in a contemporary moment that claims those histories are in the past and no longer relevant. Santa Ana finds that it is within Asian American literature that these memories are revived. By looking at Chang-rae Lee’s

Native Speaker and Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*, Santa Ana reveals how being mixed-race in the space of these novels is to experience "ethnic remembering: emotions of affiliation and identification with immigrant ancestors that articulate remembering the psychological pains of transnational Asian movement and dislocation" (Santa Ana 175-176). Santa Ana argues that it in the space of literature and through the experiences of feeling ancestral and ethnic remembering that mixed-race Asian Americans are able to "claim both filial and affiliative origins" as well as a way for Asian American literature to resist "the violence of historical amnesia and color blindness" (199).

Mixing Up Marriage Equality

In one of the final chapters of the *War Baby/Love Child* anthology, "Loving Days: Images of Marriage Equality Then and Now," Stuart Gaffney, a marriage equality activist, and Ken Tanabe, the founder and president of Loving Day, discuss connections between anti-miscegenation laws and the more contemporary fight for gay marriage through the visual image. In the conversation, Stuart Gaffney connects his parent's "illegal" marriage—his mother was Chinese and his father was white—in the 1950's to his own marriage to his husband. He describes images of Mildred and Richard Loving, the defendants in *Loving v. Virginia*, as "earnest" and writes, "I believe this earnestness has its roots in the simplicity of a couple in love standing up for who they are, for each other, and for their family together. I see this same trait in...today's marriage equality lawsuits" (Gaffney and Tanabe 233). The connection between the two causes is simply linked through an earnest desire for recognition of the individual's love, family structure, and personhood by the state.

However, when looking at the language of *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), the U.S. Supreme Court case that ruled Virginia's anti-miscegenation statute as unconstitutional, complicates this simplified connection between anti-miscegenation and marriage equality. Chief Justice Warren delivered the majority opinion to the Court on June 12, 1967 (now memorialized as Loving Day) and the language he uses engages white supremacist and heteropatriarchal modes of power that govern sexual desire and anxieties of racial mixing. Warren very clearly states that, "the fact that Virginia prohibits only interracial marriages involving white persons demonstrates that the racial classifications must stand on their own justification, as measures designed to maintain White Supremacy" (Loving). Warren names anti-miscegenation laws specifically barring people of color from marrying white people as maintaining racial purity and white supremacy. Justice Warren's decision, however, simultaneously maintains and strengthens heterosexual and patriarchal marriage as not only a "vital personal right" and as a part of the "basic civil rights of man," but also as an institution that is "fundamental to our very existence and survival" (Loving). While Gaffney and Tanabe herald *Loving v. Virginia* as a win for civil rights and a move toward marriage equality, the decision very clearly upholds heteropatriarchal marriage. In fact, I'd argue that it uses its anti-racist stance as a way to veil the government's interests in upholding the heteropatriarchal order. There are moments in which Chief Justice Warren's language is powerful, particularly when he names Virginia's Racial Integrity Act of 1924 as operating under and upholding white supremacy; yet, in the genre of legal decisions, *Loving* does little to address historical and continued anxieties around racial mixing. While *Loving v. Virginia* legalizes interracial couples and thus makes them legible through state-sanctioned marriage, the specter of the mixed race child remains ignored. In addition, the queer mixed race figure is

impossible and illegible through the simultaneous approval of interracial relationships and the disavowal of queer desire.

Wei Ming Dariotis' essay, "'My Race, Too, Is Queer': Queer Mixed Heritage Chinese Americans Fight for Marriage Equality," looks at the intersection of mixed heritage¹ and queer Chinese Americans, specifically through marriage rights, as a way to expand or redefine what she sees as the boundaries or borders of Chinese America. Dariotis uses Stuart Gaffney's 2000 documentary video, *Transgressions*, particularly his declaration that "From now on I will say my sexuality is queer and my race, too is queer," to connect oppressive structures of homophobia and racism through their "common cause" of marriage equality (Gaffney 35). This connection happens through Gaffney's queering of race, and his seeing both queer and interracial love as acts of transgression and resistance. Dariotis connects the queering of race in Gaffney's film to arguments Rachel Moran makes in *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance*. Moran looks at both the 1878 restriction of marriage between Chinese and whites and the 1901 criminalization of interracial marriage to argue that "California's 1905 antimiscegenation law reflected fears of both racial difference and sexual deviance" (Moran 32). Both Chinese men and women were deemed sexually deviant or, as Dariotis argues, "*outside of normative sexuality*" and that "the sexuality of Chinese was deemed 'queer' – specifically because of their race" (36, emphasis Dariotis). Thus, the regulation of race is inherently tied to sexuality and that which is deemed non-normative and deviant. While Dariotis' argument is compelling, particularly in thinking about the ways the Chinese were both racialized and queered through anti-miscegenation laws and anxieties surrounding their "deviant" sexuality, I wonder how we can

¹ Dariotis uses "mixed heritage" over "mixed race" as a way to undermine that races are essential separate categories "that by the same definition should not be mixed" (33).

move away from state-sanctioned marriage as a tool of resistance for mixed race and queer communities.

Embracing In-Betweenness

Women of color feminism, particularly queer Chicana conceptualizations of hybridity and in-betweenness, bring some solutions to the question I ask above. Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts of *nepantla* or in-betweenness and *mestiza consciousness*, the transcendence of temporal and spatial boundaries, the creation of alternative space of survival for those who inhabit physical, emotional, and structural borders open up new possibilities for a queer mixed-race discourse. Cherrie Moraga's "Theory in the Flesh," posits that knowledge and politics are produced through our bodies and our personal, familial and ancestral ties. This breaks down hierarchies of knowledge, and suggests that the emotional or irrational is no less valuable, or is possibly more valuable than what has been deemed knowledge by the white heteropatriarchal academy. While interdisciplinary scholarship breaks down the boundaries between different types of knowledge, the work of women of color feminists continues to break down the boundaries between knowledge and emotion. Activist/movement writers such as Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, create theory through the poetic, the creative, the personal, and the scholarly. As Chicana feminists, they also engage in theories of hybridity that are reflected in their forms. Mixedness becomes a vehicle for possibility, a borderland in which binaries are broken down. If legal texts such as *Loving* ignore the mixed race child, women of color feminists—Chicana feminists in particular—fully recuperate the mixed race child through their writing and methodology. In addition, this queer woman of color framework is not dependent upon state legibility; rather it is critical of and resistant to the state.

When thinking about this work, I can't help but come back to this word intimate. Moraga and Anzaldua's writing is intimate; it invites you into the deepest and darkest parts of themselves while also mirroring the ways in which oppression, sexism, racism, and homophobia are intimate systems as well. For example, when Moraga writes about the ways men can hate and oppress women even in their love and desire for them, she writes, "It lives and breathes in the flesh and blood of our families, even in the name of love" (108). One of my intentions in writing this collection is to figure out that intimacy, and make sense of it.

Speculative Futures

As we move into the future, technology becomes more and more integrated into our physical bodies in racialized and gendered ways, and mixed-race bodies often represent both the constructedness of race and the fear of racial mixing. In "Racial Speculations: (Bio)technology, *Battlestar Galactica*, and a Mixed-Race Imagining," Jinny Huh analyzes the popular science fiction television show *Battlestar Galactica* alongside narratives of assisted reproductive technologies (ART). She argues that despite color-blind rhetoric that obscures cultural and individual racism, the "baby industry" remains "racially coded and determined" and that anxieties of racial mixings become "evident in the intersection between biotechnology and race" (Huh 101-102).

Huh begins by looking closely at an advertisement placed by a white man and a Chinese woman that ran in MIT's newspaper, *The Tech*, titled "Genius Asian Egg Donor wanted to help us build our family: \$20,000 compensation" (101). The advertisement looks for a Chinese woman who is at the top of her class and has multiple high school and university awards. The ad uses racialized stereotypes and assumptions and alarmingly reveals that the "reproductive future

of the human race is centrally determined by those with economic means and specific racial desires” (Huh 102). Huh finds that in both the speculative narrative of *Battlestar Galactica* and our contemporary moment of reproduction through assisted productive technologies, Asian-white mixings are acceptable and even desirable “when the Asian partner is female and ultimately conforms to the submissive Asian woman stereotype” (103). However, notions of racial contamination around blackness remain; ethnographic research found that while white surrogates welcomed gestating Asian babies, they refused to gestate black babies (Huh 105). Huh uses Foucault’s notion of “biopower” or the “techniques [used] for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (105) to describe how ART and its practitioners use technology to manage race and racial mixing, becoming engineers of the *look* of race (105). Racial borders are contained because of the need to protect the heteropatriarchal family. For example, the baby must “naturally” *look* like his/her parents in order he/she not to be interpreted as a result of a mother’s affair (Huh 106). However, this is compounded by racist taboos and fears of “black bodies, blood, and genes” that still render themselves visible in ART (Huh 106).

I see possibilities of resistance within the space of genre literature—within science fiction, in particular— and the ways in which this marginalized literary tradition is very often a space for alternative imaginings. Betsy Huang argues that Asians and Asia have long been a part of a colonized speculative imagination and gaze. White science fiction writers have created and built upon orientalist and techno-orientalist tropes, from Dr. Fu Manchu to machine-like Chinese workers and laborers. While this history could have been one of the reasons Asian American writers did not engage with the genre until this past decade, Huang suggests that the genre of science fiction provides the Asian American writer with “unique narrative tools for destabilizing

the generic and social imperatives that have governed Asian American literary production” (Huang 100). Science fiction is a subversive space for Asian American writers and writers of color more broadly to critique, undermine, and even queer genre conventions.

Octavia's Brood, a recently published anthology, includes science fiction stories by writers and social justice activists. Honoring Octavia E. Butler, a formative speculative and Afrofuturist writer, the collection defines its work as “visionary fiction,” science fiction that unsettles hegemony and builds toward a freer world. One of the editors, Walidah Imarisha, writes in the introduction, “Visionary fiction encompasses all the fantastic, with the arc always bending toward justice” (4). Imarisha goes on to argue that all organizing is science fiction because it is imagining a different and better world; in addition, those from marginalized and oppressed communities are living science fiction. Imarisha writes, “Each of us is already science fiction walking around on two legs. Our ancestors dreamed us up and then bent reality to create us” (5). The editors of *Octavia's Brood* make a clear connection between social justice organizing and the work of science fiction, arguing that the latter is an important tool in imagining liberation. In addition, they see science fiction as not only being a narrative of the future, but one that also remembers the past.

Marginalized writers can queer science fiction by challenging oppression and creating non-normative narratives within a traditionally white and male dominated genre. There are some people who might not consider my work to be science fiction, but I see science fiction as one genre that enables the weirdness that I spoke of earlier. My stories use fantastic methods in order to disrupt structures of power.

Assembling My Queer Mixed Race Body

Collectively, these stories grapple with the issues I raise above. While I have found constant critique and analysis exhausting, it remains an important part of the work that I do. I am building upon knowledge, and it is in the writing of these short stories that I have found a generative space to engage with that scholarship.

The collection's title, *How to Build a Better Body*, signals the focus each story has on the queer mixed race body. How does the state attempt to build "better" bodies through violence and erasure? How do white supremacy, heteropatriarchy and capitalism impact the ways we engage with our bodies? What does it mean when mixed race bodies are deemed "better" bodies?

"1,000-Year-Old Ghosts" engages with the survival strategies of gendered and racialized intergenerational trauma. Centered on the relationship between a grandmother, mother, and granddaughter, the women grapple with the physical and emotion effects of pickling memories. Connected to Jeffery Santa Ana's concept of feeling ancestral, the granddaughter in "1,000-Year-Old Ghosts" wrestles with the impulses to both forget and memorialize ancestral pain as a mixed race woman.

"Real Bodies" explores the systemic erasure of bodies of color through a government breeding project. Within this dystopic future, politics of desire are taken to an extreme when the government becomes a technological cupid. This story came out of my questions surrounding the romanticization and fetishization of interracial relationships and their mixed race children. I was troubled by the "racial savior" figure and rhetoric that Kina and Dariotis discuss, and I wanted to see some of its logic to a sinister conclusion. "Real Bodies" explores how marriage is a part of systems of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, most explicitly seen in conversation with *Loving v. Virginia* and questions of marriage equality.

“A Slow Connection” looks at the impossibility of wholeness under white supremacy through a conversation between a biracial person split into two separate bodies. The story uses columns and breaks away from the typical short story form in order to render the physicality of this split visible. The second speculative story of the collection, “A Slow Connection” hopes to undermine political, cultural and medical structures that leave marginalized people fractured, as well as queer the mainstream science fiction genre conventions through both its experimental form and its focus on the affective dimension of the split rather than the science behind it.

Finally, “Hunted” investigates how desire cannot be rendered neutral under the previously mentioned systems through an unfaithful re-telling of the Narcissus myth. The narrator looks for a reflection she can trust throughout her whole life and thinks that she has found that with Eleanor. However, when Eleanor reveals herself to be an unfaithful reflection, the narrator must piece something else together herself. “Hunted” is about the search for a home, and ultimately finding it within a space of in-betweenness, a place that is not necessarily part of the “real” or normative. I see “Hunted” as my most hopeful story as it ends in a moment of a weird and queered possibility of wholeness.

Before diving into my stories, the most important part of this work, I first need to admit how intimate this feels. They are fictional, yet even that boundary between fiction and non-fiction is faulty and blurred, and this thesis very much feels as if it is a part of my own body. After two years of working on this collection, it’s difficult to let it go and let it become something that no longer belongs to me.

1,000-YEAR-OLD GHOSTS

Popo taught me to pickle memories when I was thirteen. It's just like cucumbers, radishes, cabbage. I learned to cut them into even squares. Memories cut like apples; the knife slides through their protective skin with a crisp snap. I packed them in jars filled with salt, sugar, vinegar, and water. Adding herbs and spices can distort, make them harder to swallow. "It's a family secret," she said to me. "It allows you to forget."

"Forget what?" I asked.

"Anything. Forgetting does not come easily to the women in our family. We have our jars."

"What are we trying to forget, Popo?"

"So many questions. Chop this into smaller pieces."

We started with minor moments: (1) When I dropped my underwear on the floor of the changing room after swim practice at school and Abigail Kincaid picked it up and showed the whole class. (2) The time I tugged on a strange woman's skirt in a Costco checkout line because I thought, for a second, that she was my mother. (3) A recurring nightmare of being alone in an abandoned building with no way to get out.

"How do you feel?" she asked after the lids were tightened.

It felt like clenching and unclenching my jaw, like a steady beat of tension and release. Instead of telling her I felt full and empty at the same time, I shrugged.

She never asks him about futures where he does not come back. She prays that he returns to her, but only when she is alone. She asks him what he would like for dinner. She prays that

business will stay good before they go to bed. Their silence is steady and it endures. It is a silence they agreed to.

He travels back and forth between their apartment in San Francisco and Southern China. It is rare to have a husband whose body tastes like the Pacific Ocean. It is rare to have a husband made mostly of salt.

I was Popo's daughter's daughter, but our saltwater bond was stronger than blood. We exhausted my mother. "Ma, why are you teaching her that?" she asked. It was a grey Sunday morning and Popo was helping me pickle a few things. It had been a bad week and I didn't want to remember any of it.

"Because you won't," Popo said.

"Do you have your own jars, Mom?" I asked. I had searched for them without any luck.

"No," she said. Like Popo, my mother was good at shutting down conversations. There were so many times that she felt far away. My arms could never quite reach her.

"That's not true, Anne," Popo said. "We made you one or two when you were younger. You remember that."

"Is that right?" Mom wasn't looking at either of us. She was still holding a paper napkin she had used at breakfast. She was trying to smooth out the creases with her fingers. She opened her mouth to say something, but hesitated.

"Yes," Popo said.

"I'm sick of this." My mother's fingers tore the napkin to pieces. "How come you decide what all of us remember or forget?" There was water in her eyes. I wanted to wipe it away for

her, but I was afraid her tears would not be like mine. I was afraid my mother was not made of salt. “You know what, Ma?” she said. “I remember everything.”

The street outside their apartment is loud the way city streets tend to be. It drifts in through the open windows of their front room, and she lets it fill up the space he left behind. It sits in his favorite chair, the blue one next to the fireplace. After the sound of the city is well rested, it moves across the front room and embeds itself into the cracks in the floorboards. It touches all of his books and then settles into his side of the bed. She holds it as she falls asleep. She smells it the next morning in her hair. She keeps it there until the rest of the city wakes up and it makes its way outside again.

When he comes home, he shuts the windows and says he is tired of loud noises. He tells her how the ocean roars and the wind cracks. He tells her he has been looking forward to the silence of home.

My mother went through my room to find and display my jars on the kitchen counter. They confronted me when I got home from school, my mother and my jars. One day, after she had found five of them tucked in my sock drawer, she told me to sit down with her.

“I know Popo thinks this is best, but memories are important even when they are painful. I’m concerned about you,” she said. “Both of you.”

“I’m fine, Mom. Popo is fine,” I said.

“She’s not fine. I know she thinks she can control these things, but she can’t. Her short-term memory is getting worse. She forgets where she puts things, she doesn’t show up to appointments, she can’t even tell me what she had for breakfast some days. Popo isn’t fine.” Her

voice was clear and calm, but it bounced inside my head until it ached. I looked at my jars on the kitchen counter and tried to remember what was in them. They could have been anyone's jars. The liquid inside was murky, almost grey. I wanted to open them up. I wanted to push them off the ledge to see them break open.

“Do you really remember everything?” I asked her. I tried to remember stories about her before me, ones that she must have told me, but I couldn't remember any.

“Nobody remembers everything,” she said.

“But you told Popo—”

“I was upset.”

“Tell me something then.”

We stayed at the kitchen table and she talked. When the darkness slipped into the room and sat down with us, my mother looked at my face. I couldn't see her gaze through the dark – we hadn't turned the lights on— but I could feel it on my skin. It felt determined and maybe like love.

Things she told me: Popo would prepare for Gung Gung's homecomings with his favorite dishes— winter melon soup and salted duck. Popo would wear a pink dress on those days because she said Gung Gung was tired of the blues and greens of the ocean. Popo's comforter was white and felt like velvet, even though it was only made of cotton. Popo would let my mother sleep with her when Gung Gung was away. My mother met my father when they both worked for an insurance company in downtown Sacramento. They were both already married, but my father asked my mother out for a drink one day after work and she said yes. Popo liked my father because he was really American, unlike my mother's first husband who grew up in Chinatown like them. My parents loved each other so much that she was never hungry. When my

father left without saying goodbye, my mother ate everything in the refrigerator and the pantry and the cupboards.

The memories came in pieces. Sometimes she stumbled, searched for something else to tell me. She wanted to fill the silence but didn't have enough words. When she was done, she asked me how I felt, and I didn't have the heart to tell her that it felt the same. It felt like clenching and unclenching my jaw, like a steady beat of tension and release. I felt full and empty at the same time.

She is less lonely now that she has Anne. She has something to hold onto when she walks through Chinatown, something to ground her to the sidewalk. She used to think that she would float away with nothing solid to hold her down. Now she walks with purpose.

She teaches Anne how to say apple and block in English. She does not talk to her in Cantonese. When she does not know the word she is looking for in English she says nothing.

As I got older, I filled my jars with the things I had been holding onto. It was a feeling larger than relief. I poured out jams, mayonnaise, and peanut butter. I clogged every drain in the house to create a space to put myself away.

(1) I chose to forget the song that was playing when I lost my virginity to a boy who changed the sheets right after. (2) I chose to forget the white woman at the grocery store who told me I was prettier because I wasn't full Chinese. I chose to forget her hands in my hair. "You're so lucky," she said. (3) I chose to forget the men who leered at me when I walked down the street and the one who told me, "I've never had one like you before." (4) I chose to forget how my mother looked after the spindled cancer cells settled into her body. (5) I chose to forget

the woman on the bus who spoke to me in Cantonese, and how I did not know how to respond. I searched for words that someone should have taught me, and I couldn't find them anywhere.

Popo never warned me not to let it become a habit, a practice, a daily ritual. Mom wasn't around to count my jars, display them, remind me of things I had already forgotten, witness my slow dissolve. I made the pickling liquid in large batches. I bought sugar and vinegar in bulk. My jars overflowed and spilled onto my hands until they stung.

Every time he comes back, he feels more foreign. He says "néih hóu ma," but she responds in English. She practices with Anne. She learns new words every day.

"One day Anne's children will not know how to speak our language," he tells her.

She wants to say, "Maybe that will be for the best. They will stop longing for things they cannot have. There will be no reason to leave. Not everyone can live in between things. Not everyone can survive being split into two. There are fish that die in saltwater."

She drank a glass of saltwater every night before her evening prayers. When I asked why, she said it was a leftover habit from when my Gung Gung would travel. "He died on his way back to China. Did you know that?"

"You told me," I said.

"I just wanted to make sure you didn't forget."

She poured salt into the bottom of an empty glass and then filled the glass with water at the kitchen sink. She took her time, drank it while she was reading a magazine. I never asked for a glass and she never offered.

“Popo?” I asked after her glass was washed and set down to dry. “What do you put in your jars?”

“I don’t remember,” she said. “That is their purpose.”

“But aren’t there things you wish you hadn’t forgotten?” I asked. She looked at me for a long time before she answered.

“No,” she said. Then she added in a softer voice, “Sometimes I think there are not enough jars in this city for me to fill.”

He is dying but refuses to die in America. “I am going home,” he says. “I cannot be buried here.” He makes the necessary travel arrangements. He plans to leave in only a few weeks.

“You are leaving me here,” she says to him.

“Yes.”

“What am I supposed to do without you?” she asks. “What about Anne?”

“What does it matter? I am dying either way.” He looks at her and smiles. “You don’t want my ghost to haunt you. It’s better for both of us if I go.”

“Yes,” she says. “You’re right.”

To guarantee that she is not haunted by her dead husband, she stuffs most of what she has of him into thirty-seven glass jars. She only leaves enough to tell her future grandchildren (1) his name, (2) his occupation, (3) where he was born, (4) where he died, (5) the saltiness of his breath.

She does not have a backyard to bury the rest of him, so she pushes him underneath her bed instead. The first night that she sleeps with them, she hears a steady humming that keeps her

awake. It never goes away, and she never moves the jars. Instead, she learns to live with the hum until she forgets it is even there.

“Anne, grab me the measuring cups,” she said one afternoon.

“Popo,” I said. “I’m Katie. Anne was my mother.” Her eyebrows furrowed. She moved around me and grabbed the measuring cups for herself. The symptoms my mother had witnessed in Popo years before had only gotten worse. She was shriveling.

“Please stop. This is making you sick,” I said. She continued to measure and chop; she licked her index finger, dipped it into a bowl of salt in front of her, and then popped it back in her mouth to taste. I wanted to imitate her, feel the small grains on my own tongue, but I stopped myself.

“I’m close,” she said.

“Close to what? What else could you have to forget?” I slammed my hands on the counter. Her bowl of salt shook.

We stood in silence until she said, “I love you, but I wish I remembered how to say it the other way.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

The tears on her face looked almost milky white.

“There was a way I used to say it. I don’t remember the words. I used to say it to someone,” she said. “Do you remember?”

“No, Popo,” I said. “I don’t.”

When she watches Katie, she does not put her down. Katie's skin is soft underneath her fingertips and she wonders how much sadness this little body could take. She smells just like Anne did when she was a baby, but looks so different. There are only traces and they are harder to hold on to. She is half-ghost. If she puts Katie down she will disappear, and she will not be able to find her again. She holds onto her because this is not a thing she can let go of.

She finished dissolving seven years after mom died. By the end, her slow pickling process had picked up speed. Everything I loved became smaller and smaller until she started to break apart in my hands and fall through my permanently wrinkled fingertips. My memory was shaky. Most of the water in my body was salt. I no longer had difficulty forgetting; it came easily with or without a jar. Remembering was harder. It kept me awake at night.

As I packed up her home, I looked for all the places that Popo had put herself to rest. I walked through each room, sat on each chair, picked up each knickknack, ran my fingers over every book's spine. I went through all of her drawers, her closets. I took every lid off of every box. Jars were hidden everywhere.

She was right. There hadn't been enough jars in the city to hold everything she needed to put down. She had started to fill milk jugs and ice cream pints. Even her shampoo bottles and toothpaste tubes had memories stuffed inside them.

I laid them out in her living room. Floor space was scarce. I balanced them on top of each other. They sank between couch cushions. One or two rolled behind the television. I played a childhood game to choose one: *my mother said to pick the very best one and that is—*

Like the others, its contents blurred in the murky liquid. I wanted to say that it looked familiar, but of course it didn't. I pulled on the lid, but my hands kept slipping. I was too weak or

the jar was too strong or whatever was inside didn't want to be taken back. I threw it against the wall. The glass shattered, the liquid dripped to the floor, the memory clung to the paint. Its smell surprised me— orange peels and baby powder. Popo was holding my mother's head in her lap, pushing her hair back with her hands, cooing to her softly. It was an intimacy that I hadn't seen before, and a part of me wanted to push it back inside. The memory played in a loop, but each time something was slightly different. Sometimes Popo's shirt was a different color, sometimes my mother's head rested on her shoulder, sometimes my mother looked older or younger. I couldn't pick it up entirely; it kept slipping out of my hands.

One by one, I opened the rest of them. Sometimes they smelled rancid, like death. These were ones of her travels from China, her first few years living in San Francisco, my mother's sickness and funeral. Many of them smelled like the ocean, like Gung Gung's seawater breath, like the smells that made up her heartbreak. The ones of me smelled like vanilla yogurt and strawberries.

The floor was wet. I lay down in the mess and let my clothes soak it all up. If they had been there, I would have told them this: (1) I still long for things I cannot have. (2) I am living in between things. I am not split in two. (3) We are drowning in all this saltwater.

REAL BODIES

You log in to your account every morning to prove that you're trying. Some say it's a rumor that you're monitored, that your chats are reviewed, your movement before and after The Website© is tracked. It's just a rumor, but you still rehearse every click and keystroke. You tap a button on the top right of your computer screen with your right thumb. The webcam's red light turns on and scans your retinas. You check your inbox – no new matches. The red and pink envelope is empty. Even on a government run website – a candy heart veneer is imbedded into the code. A frowning cupid mocks you as it flies around the window.

This is not a website where you initiate conversations, complete personality tests, or rank people by their pictures and whether or not they like flan. You remember a time when you would not respond to the men who wanted to know where you are from, the ones who wanted to run their hands through your thick dark hair, and wanted to know what your mother cooks for you when you're sad. Responses are now required. They're watching you. You could get into some deep shit.

On The Website©, you are given matches by the state. You think there was a time, maybe a few years ago, when all websites were going to be turned over to the federal government, but that didn't happen. It makes more sense this way – what is the point if a woman in Wisconsin is paired with a man in New Mexico? Long distance relationships are not the point. They are hard to control. Despite science's best efforts, you cannot procreate over the Internet yet.

It's framed like a choice, like you can pick from a multitude of people who are carefully selected *just for you*, but there are guidelines. There are expectations. There are rules. You click a box and agree.

1. There are two and only two genders. There are only men and women and this is determined by birth. Men are paired with women. Women are paired with men.
2. You belong to a specific class: A, B, C, D, E or F. These classes correspond to how much money you have in the bank, your race, where you grew up, where you went to school, how much money your parents have in the bank, your job, etc. You are only matched with people in your class or the one directly below or above it. This is to create a sense of mobility.
3. White people can be matched with other white people, but people of color can only be matched with white people. This is to create a sense of mobility.
4. You are not who you think you are. You do not want what you think you want.

You don't know what you look like. Sometimes when you're at your desk at work, your fingers start to twitch and your knees shake. Sweat accumulates at your temples and your lip starts to bleed because you've been biting it. You get the overwhelming urge to go to the bathroom to make sure you're still there, a reminder of where your eyes sit on your face and how brown your skin is. When you're out on dates and men tell you that you are beautiful, you smile and nod the way you are supposed to. You want to ask them what they see when they look at you. You want them to describe how your eyes sit on your face and how brown your skin is. You want them to point to another woman in the restaurant and say, "Her. You look like her and she looks like you." You need another point of comparison, a second opinion.

When you cannot find your reflection, you resort to touch. You feel for your left arm with your right fingers, all five of them. Each one is dragged across the bumps on your skin. Once you have confirmed that your left arm is there and your right fingers are touching it, you lose one of

your earlobes or a your whole neck. Your body is constantly looking for itself, remembering itself. It's nothing like the people who lose their limbs, or maybe it's just the opposite, but you still think of your lost body parts as ghostly, weightless, always at risk of floating away from you forever.

Carol picks you up and drives you to work. She works with you at the University. You drive with Carol because she knows all the words to pop songs on the radio. You like to watch her bob her head in time to the music; sometimes you're afraid that she is going to crash the car because she closes her eyes during the best parts. It's worth it because you like to watch her and she doesn't mind when you do.

She honks her horn when she's outside instead of sending you a text. There are rumors that they can read your text messages too. Carol stopped using her cell phone a few weeks ago. She drops by without calling and shoves handwritten notes underneath doors instead of sending e-mails.

"Any new prospects?" she asks. Even Carol can't avoid The Website©. If she didn't login somebody would contact her. They would e-mail her, text her, call her. Eventually someone would knock down her door and force her to look at pictures and profiles until she said yes.

"No, but I'm happy for the break. My date last night was awful," you say.

"Tell me about it," Carol says. "I have two tonight – Luke and Matthew."

"Together?"

“Wouldn’t that be great? I’m sure They would love that. No, I’m trying a double feature tonight – a two-birds-one-stone type thing.” She asks you to hold the wheel so she can pull her mass of curls into a bun on top of her head.

You and Carol are both mutts – she has a white mom and black dad and you have a Chinese mom and a white dad. Both of your parents were married only a short time after it was legal to do so. Now you and Carol are held up as examples. Beauty is just enough white to soften the rough edges.

“It’s exhausting,” she says. “Do you remember it always being this exhausting?”

“Like before?” You ask. She nods. She is holding a hairpin between her lips. “I barely remember before.”

“Back then you could stare across the room at someone and think about what’d it be like to fool around with them in the backseat of a car.” She sighs and you wish you could breathe in all the air her body pushes out, sit on her lap and inhale as she exhales.

You shrug. “That was forever ago.”

They figured a way to kill us without attracting international attention. They wrapped it up with pink and red ribbon. They stuffed it with Valentine’s Day chocolate, diamonds, and a promise that things will be better this way. They figured a way to breed it out of us. All it takes is a few sacrificial generations.

Your parents were married to other people before they married each other. They both had other children, one son each. You have two half-brothers – one white and one Chinese – and you fit snugly between them. When you are out with your family, you are often reminded that you are

the piece that makes everyone else work. You are the thing that allows them all to make sense. Brad and Lawrence are both married now; they found their matches on The Website© a few years ago and settled into middle-class suburbia just fine. They are having children now. Their broods are going to look just like you.

The hot air outside sticks to your skin; heat swells and fills up the almost empty campus. You open up the one window in your office and leave the lights off. There is something in your shoe. It's small, but you can't ignore it. Your foot feels like it's aching. When it becomes too much, you push your shoe off by its heel. Relief floods you – it rushes up from your foot, through your body, all the way to your shoulders. The phone rings.

“Hello?” you answer.

“Hello Ms. [redacted], this is [redacted] calling from The Website©!” the voice is cheery and you imagine its owner is dressed like a cherub. You almost hang up the phone, but you know it wouldn't do any good. They know where you are.

“How can I help you?” you say in a voice like syrup. You hope [redacted] thinks you suck on candy hearts all day – maybe one that says, *Be Mine*.

“I was just looking through your account records and I saw that you do not have any matches for today,” the voice says. You think the voice wants a response, but it doesn't. “That was a mistake. I'm making arrangements for you to meet with a man named Barry. He is an accountant from Class C. His listed interests include: water skiing and Jay-Z. I will send you an e-mail regarding when and where you are to meet him along with a picture.”

“We don't live near a body of water,” you say.

“I'm sorry?”

“You said he likes to water ski, but we don’t live near a body of water.”

“Yes, well –” The cheeriness drains out of the voice and annoyance settles in to its chords. These voices are not used to holding conversations; they are meant to give information. It pauses for only a moment. “Check your e-mail.”

Click.

Barry looks like a ghost. He is smiling in the picture and it sends a chill through your body. There is a link embedded into the e-mail and it takes you to his profile. You confirm that he does indeed like water skiing and Jay-Z. The Website© has determined that you are a 98% match, a true love match. You imagine the ghost children you would have with him. You picture their light brown hair and white skin. You wonder if you could ever love a ghost child. How would you hug them without your hands going straight through their small ghost bodies?

After work, you asked if you could come over, you didn’t want to go home alone, and she said yes. It’s not encouraged, women being alone together – they have become skeptical of friendships. They remember the intimacy of such relationships. Sleepovers past the age of puberty are not encouraged. Multi-stall bathrooms with large mirrors have been converted into single-stall rooms. There is a curfew for women who do not have male escorts. There are hotlines that your neighbors can call if they notice a friend is over too late.

You scrunch her sheets until your palms sweat and your fingers ache. You want the pull of gravity to be stronger so you can sink deeper into the mattress. When her back is turned, you lie your head down on her pillow. You imagine what her sweat would smell like if it mixed with yours. Her shampoo smells like almonds and sweet milk. You want to wash your hair.

“What about this?” She’s holding a striped dress to her body. She wore it once to work and then to an office holiday party. You remember how the sleeves rested on her wrists and how you wanted to kiss them. You’ve never wanted to kiss someone’s wrist before.

“I don’t know. What about the black one instead?” You say. You want to kiss her wrists less when she wears the black dress. She nods her head and her curls bounce.

You try to remember what this would look like before The Website©. You would ask to kiss her and she would nod and her curls would bounce. You would cup the back of her head and your fingers would get tangled in her hair. The kiss would be soft until it wasn’t anymore. There would be urgency, but you think it would be out of desire, not fear.

She drags lipstick over her mouth until it is red. She’s done getting ready. She gets a notification on her laptop, a cheery ping. Her date is on his way. You tell her she looks beautiful. You are close enough to feel the heat coming off of her body, close enough that you feel everything that makes her and you up. You think that you could live off this forever. Even if you could never touch, you could stand that close to feel those vibrations and it would be enough.

Barry looks at you the way people always look at you. He took you to a nice place. The white candlesticks melt down to the white tablecloth until the wax disappears in the fabric. The plates are also white. You’re so focused on the table setting that you can’t recall what the rest of the room looks like. You’re afraid to look up, afraid to see the other women on dates. Afraid you’ll see yourself or even worse, Carol, reflected in their performances.

“Where are you from?” he asks. You tell him where, but he still looks confused. The Website© doesn’t publicize information on ethnicity. Their official policy is that “labels divide us.” They say that it won’t matter in the future anyway.

“My mom is Chinese and my dad is white.” He’s relieved.

“You know, my parents aren’t too thrilled on this whole thing,” he says. “You know, the direction The Website© is taking us. I think they really hoped I would settle down with a girl from my church.” You nod your head and smile like you are supposed to. “But I think they’d really like you. You’re beautiful and just different enough. Our children might get lucky and still have blue eyes. Think how pretty their skin will be. Such a light caramel color.” He’s getting excited now, talking about suburbs you could move to and how advanced your kids will be. He stuffs meat and potatoes in his mouth. This is your American dream.

You take him home with you because it’s not against the rules when he’s a white man. You just want to know what it feels like. You want confirmation. He asks you where your bedroom is and then he leads you there. He pushes you down onto the bed and smiles. He bites your skin hard enough to bruise it. You feel the vessels breaking, leaking out. When he puts his body inside your body, first his tongue, then his fingers, then his dick. He asks if this is how you like it and you wonder if maybe it is. He lifts you off the bed and into the air; you lose contact with your newly stained sheets. You hear yourself echoing him. *I like it. I like it. I like it.* When it’s over, his whole body surrounds you in an embrace. He squeezes you tight and it feels like he’s keeping you together. He tells you that you’re beautiful and you wonder what that means about your eyes and your skin and your parents and your children and your children’s children. You do not smile. You pretend to sleep.

You’re standing on top of your apartment building. It’s only five flights up, but you can see the city stretched out before you. Mrs. Costello, your downstairs neighbor, is parking her car in the lot behind the building. You almost wave to her, but then think better of it; Mrs. Costello doesn’t

like you very much. She, like many of the previous generation, is wary of you and yours. She thinks you're a very sweet girl, but she doesn't understand the online dating business. It's just not *right*. Besides, she probably doesn't even see you.

Large ceramic planters surround most of the building, and you wonder if one would catch you if you jumped. You imagine the sky pushing and the earth pulling you down and your bones start to tingle inside of your skin. You step onto the ledge because you want to feel the force of gravity, the impact of cement, ceramic, and dirt. You decide that if you were to jump your body would not break in two like you once thought. It would finally be whole.

A SLOW CONNECTION

I call her on the phone every night at 8 pm my time and 11 pm hers. It is not a phone call of pleasure, but one of necessity. After almost twelve hours of disappearing, I need to charge again. She has gone even longer. When the split first happened, she took more strength. Or maybe it's just easier for her. This is something she denies, but it is something I am sure about.

I took more certainty.

She's so polite.
"Fine."

"I didn't have time."

It's hard to be homesick for a person you don't like very much. My anger is a part of my active yearning for her. I want my body to entangle into hers.

I miss her.

"How was your day?"

"Did you read the article I messaged you? It said that if you and I try to connect more—"

She's frustrated with me. I can feel her annoyance seep out of my own skin.

It's hard to be homesick for a person you don't like very much. My anger is a part of my active yearning for her. I want my body to entangle into hers.

I miss her.

We were a whole person for three hours and twenty-five minutes. A few years before we were born, researchers decided that biracial children would be both physically and mentally more stable if they were separated. Split in pieces. Instead of one child, both this and that, there would be two, one this and one that. They said it would be like Siamese Twins or some shit.

Our mother named us Clara even though they told her not to. They said there wasn't a point. We would have to have separate names to correspond with our separate bodies. But there were moments when she would forget and call us Clara. "Clara, it's time for bed," she would say to us, and we would say "okay, Mama" in unison so she wouldn't be shocked by the reminder that she had two daughters even though she had only asked for one.

pull me in front of mirrors and have us stand side-by-side.

When we were growing up it wasn't so bad, except when strangers would come up to Mama and ask how the adoption process was, what it was like having a baby from China or Korea. They would tell her about their sister or their cousin or about Leslie, their coworker down at the university, and their husbands and their trips to Asia. Mama would nod her head politely and wait for a long enough breath for her to tell them that Tess came out of her vagina.

She would say vagina like it was underlined, bolded, italicized.

They didn't believe her often – the strangers or the teachers or the social workers – but they would smile and nod back at her. They would forgive her for her vulgarity. They would reach out to touch my dark hair. They would smile at Jenny's blue eyes, the eyes she inherited from Mama.

I don't think we look that different. Sometimes I look in the mirror and I see her reflection, bits of her face in mine. I can see her in me.

I've tried to imagine what our faces would look like together, but I can't. Jenny says she can. When we were younger she would reach for my hand and

We are wearing the same dress.
We can perfectly mimic each
other's movements.

We didn't start out as sisters, but we were raised as a freakish set of twins who didn't just share a womb or an embryo but a whole body for nine months and three hours and twenty-five minutes.

When we were babies, we could not bear to be a part from one another. Our skin had to constantly be in contact. If for some reason we were separated, even if by accident, we would scream. Papa tried to stop her, but Mama eventually pushed our beds together after finding us on the floor morning after morning, our little bodies littered with bruises from the hardwood floor.

As we got older, it got harder for the rest of the world to understand why a white girl and a Chinese girl had the same last name, the same mannerisms, the same allergy to peanuts. Teachers refused to let our pinkies touch in the aisles between our desks. They said we were a distraction. We got used to the pain of separation. We stopped screaming.

“How’s Ella? Jordan has been asking about her aunt. We should get together sometime.”

“Everyone’s good, Jenny. I mean, maybe. Ella is going up for tenure next year. I don’t know if it’s in the cards right now.”

“Researchers have found that twins who –”

“We’re not twins, Jenny”

“Fine. Pairings. Is that better? Pairings that see each other in person, that physically touch each other, report higher rates of happiness and are overall more satisfied with their lives.”

“Wasn’t the purpose of the split to give us better lives? Next thing you know they’re going to try to stitch us back together.”

“Can we video chat? Maybe if we just made eye contact? For a minute?”

“I know you’re still there.”

It feels like losing oneself in a crowded room and getting goose bumps in August. It's like missing someone all the time, nostalgia rupturing our skin. It's like ripping. It's like never knowing if we'll always just be half of something whole.

When I married my husband, all traces of my father disappeared. At first, Jenny Yew became Jenny Yew Hamilton, my father's name pushed between two very American names until it popped from the pressure and I started signing my checks and daughter's permission slips as a much simpler Jenny Hamilton.

At first I felt guilty, but when I'm being honest it was a relief. People stopped questioning me, stopped looking so intently at my face when I would introduce myself or hand them my credit card.

My Asianness does not wash off. It cannot be erased. It will not disappear.

If I had married Jenny's husband, even the capital H in Hamilton would not open up the chink in my eyes.

It felt liberating.

I moved across the country the year she got married. Our phone calls are the last things connecting us – telephone poles and wires. Well, maybe more like cell phone towers and satellites. If you think about it, even phone calls are less physical now. Eventually, all technology becomes obsolete.

Our body desires itself. We touch to remind ourselves that we are real. We look at ourselves to remember what we look like. We repeat our words so they will not get lost in all of the static. We cannot lose ourselves. We do not know where we end, we do not know where we begin. We are full and empty. We are both of everything and neither at the same time.

I don't know what it means when her body feels just as much as home as mine does. I don't want to remember what it feels like to wrap our arms around each other and sigh. We don't say it out loud, but I can still feel her, thousands of miles away. I felt it when she gave birth to Jordan. And I know she's mad that I wasn't there, but I was there, I was there, I was there. I remember what it feels like to wrap our arms around each other and sigh.

And it's easier to let the static on the phone take up all the space between us. And it's easier to not feel bad about it when she could always see herself in me, but I could never do it in return.

HUNTED

When I told Joe I wanted mirrors that extended from the floor to the ceiling on every wall, including inside closets and behind appliances, he asked a reasonable question: “Why?” I did not tell him, “So I don’t lose myself” because that is not a reasonable response.

After the installation is done, I walk through every room in the house like I’m giving myself a tour. I go outside, close the front door and then open it again. There are an infinite number of me in every direction, the reflections double and triple themselves until my body is moving into spaces that my house cannot hold. I do not touch the mirrors because smudged fingerprints would ruin the effect. Instead, I take off my shoes and drag my feet across the carpeted floor. You know, to really feel the ground.

Twenty-two years old, a woman, racially ambiguous, recently singled, slight belly, mostly upbeat, landlocked and drowning, preference for brightly colored or patterned socks, masturbates frequently, literally haunted, not at all metaphorically haunted, allergic to nuts, skeptical of savory pies, thinking about dropping out of school, trying to pin down homesickness so I can hold it in my hands and maybe put it under a microscope and understand why my heart hurts. I write this list out onto one of the mirrors in the back of my bedroom closet with black and purple dry erase markers. It imprints itself onto my body when I stand in the right place.

It starts with this guy named Narcissus, this really good-looking guy. One day, he spots his reflection in a pool of water and can’t stop looking at it. He falls in love with his own image and stops eating and sleeping. He wastes away. My mom told me that story when I was younger and looking in the mirror too much. It was meant to be a lecture in the dangers of vanity.

“It’s not good for young girls to look at themselves in the mirror,” she said. “You’ll get lost in there.” I was standing in front of the bathroom mirror. It was freckled with dust and water spots. She stood by my side, and I wondered if she was looking for herself in my features. Do all parents notice the stark halfness of their children, or was it more noticeable for my mother? Did her Chinese genes invade my father’s white ones or did his colonize hers? I decided then that it was the latter; I was learning that’s how the world worked. My mom pointed at us. “There is nothing real in there,” she said.

When I’m at school now, I search for bathrooms. If someone is already in there, I sit in a stall. I flush the empty toilet. There is this one bathroom in particular. This bathroom has a full-length mirror, and after I flush the empty toilet and sneak out of the stall, I stand in front of it and do the thing my mother told me not to. I look. Looking is seeing and searching at the same time.

“What are you doing?” It’s Eleanor. We have a literature class together. I see a worn copy of *Boy, Snow, Bird* in her hands. She sweeps her blonde hair back with her fingers in this careless way that makes my stomach flip. She wears fruity lip-gloss; her eyes are green and she lines their lids with a brown pencil because black would be too dark; she’s sleeping with Mark Robertson; her light freckles look as if they are hovering above her cheeks and the bridge of her nose; she doesn’t wear foundation.

“Looking,” I tell her.

“Looking,” she echoes. I think I’m holding my breath, and looking at her feels like I’m on fire. I’m on fire. She walks toward me, and I think she’s going to kiss me. I think she’s going to kiss me. She puts our hands together, my palms on her palms. My palms on her palms. And leans in so our foreheads are touching. Our foreheads are touching.

We meet between classes to hold hands. I trace her palms with my fingers. I rub my thumb against her skin. When I clean out my car later, I will find her golden strands in the upholstery. They will be tangled with my dark hairs and it will make me cry.

“What do you think about?” I ask her.

“What do I think about?” She kisses my eyelids and I can smell the artificial kiwi. “You,” she says. “What do you think about?”

I think about the first summer I spent away from my parents. It was humid and always pouring. The rain couldn't break the heat, so the two danced with one another until everything was hot and wet, until we had all given in. I spent most of my time sitting on top of my sheets naked. It was my first room where I surrounded myself with mirrors. I bought them at thrift stores and off Craigslist. I drove to the suburbs for estate sales. I once picked up shards of a broken side-view mirror from the sidewalk. The glass cut my hands, but I kept walking until I reached the water. I walked over forty city blocks in insensible shoes. Mosquitos bit around my ankles, right where my socks ended. The whole time I kept the glass clenched in my sweaty palms. Occasionally – more than occasionally, probably every five minutes or so – I looked at my reflection in the shards. I puzzled my reflection together in the broken pieces.

I would come home with my new acquisitions when I knew my roommates were at work or asleep. They were all white girls with white boyfriends. Like some of my mirrors, I had found them on Craigslist. We met at a coffee shop to make sure no one was an axe murderer. They looked at me curiously after a few minutes. “So, like, what are you?” one of them asked. I don't remember which one. They blurred together.

Eleanor takes me to visit her family. It's a three-hour-drive up the coast, and we hold hands through most of it. Not touching her is difficult. The town she grew up in is small and when we stop at the grocery store I can feel their eyes on our hands touching, our mouths touching. Touching. I can't stop touching— she pulls away from me. "I'm sorry," she says. "This is new for me." But I need her to hold me down to the ground with her; I need her to hold me still. We pick up the rest of the supplies without touching. Avocados, tomatoes, chips, seltzer because I like the carbonation. When we look through the pile of oranges, our fingers do not flirtatiously find each other. We do not grab a single orange between our two hands. We do not look up and catch each other's smiles. We leave quickly with unripened fruit, and when the automatic doors open to the California heat, the word *chink* is thrown out of a passing car's window and almost pushes my body back into the cool, conditioned air of the store. "Chink?" Eleanor echoes. She looks at me – for maybe the first time – confused.

Her parents, Cathy and Bennett, are sweet but stiff people in their early sixties. It looks as if her mother is going to reach out to hug me, but something stops her. Eleanor's father takes my hand between his own. "It's very nice to meet you," he says. I am the first woman Eleanor has brought home, and I feel their unease when she walks me to the back of the house where we will be staying. She has a canopy bed, and her comforter looks like a cloud weighed down by mountains of pillows. She pushes me down and I look at my skin against the whiteness of the blankets and the sheets. It's browner, uglier than I remember. She falls on top of me and a giggle escapes her lips. I kiss her before another one can come out, and when my hand disappears in her hair I feel an unbearable desire for my whole body to hide inside of hers. I get on top of her and almost lose her in the sheets. We sink together until a knock at the door reminds us of where we are and that it is time for dinner.

“What do your parents do?” her mother asks. She made a pot roast and mashed potatoes. I can’t tell which ceramic cow holds the salt and which holds the pepper. The food is under seasoned, and my tongue wants something with bite, something to hold onto.

“My dad runs his own company,” I say. “My mom is a nurse.” There is a silent chorus of nodding heads.

“So which –” She says and then pauses. She puts one tine of her fork into a single green pea. “Which of your parents is –” She waves her fork with the single pea still intact at me.

“I’m not quite sure what you’re asking,” I say.

“Never mind, never mind. I lost the thought.” She pops the pea in her mouth. “Tell us more about school.”

I do not touch Eleanor on the drive back the next morning. “They liked you,” she says to me. Both of her hands are firmly on the steering wheel. “I can tell.”

“I liked them too,” I say. It’s not a lie. Eleanor’s father reminded me of my uncles, the sweet way their eyes tear up when they laugh after too much wine. I could imagine spending holidays in their large living room and helping her mother in the kitchen. It could be fine. It wouldn’t be too far off.

I could begin to blend if I wanted to.

Eleanor makes us dinner in my small kitchen. She laughs at the chicken towel rack I bought at a vintage store before we met. I don’t have any flour and she scolds me. “Grab some ice cream while you’re out too,” she tells me.

I lose myself when I’m outside the house. I walk through the grocery store and panic. I catch the glances of strangers walking down the opposite end of the cereal aisle and I can’t tell if

they see me. I stand in front of the ice cream freezers and find myself reflected back at me. I trace my features slowly with my eyes and then my finger until it's cold and numb. When a woman reaches in front of me towards the door, she says, "excuse me" and grabs a pint of coffee ice cream. I smile and nod, happy she sees me, but am distressed when her body blocks my line of vision. I lose myself again, just for a second, but it's as painful as the first time. I am relieved when I come back to myself and I smile again. The woman looks at me strangely. There's neither a cart nor basket near me. My hands are empty. "Are you okay?" she asks, but I can't take my eyes off of myself. I watch as I inhale through my nose and exhale through my mouth. I feel my feet in my shoes and on the dirty linoleum floor because I can see it in front of me.

"I'm not sure," I say, but she is already gone, walking down another aisle, grabbing canned green beans and peanut butter.

It is not until I get back to the house that I realize I have forgotten the flour.

Her hazards are on and the car is still running when we break up. When she asks me *Why*, I tell her the truth. I say, *I can't taste anything*. I say, *your blonde hair makes me cry*. I say, *the worst parts of me ache when I'm with you*.

When I get to my bedroom I lie on my bed. Before Joe left, I asked him to install a mirror on the ceiling. "It's not a freaky sex thing," I wanted to tell him, but I held my tongue for the second time because I hadn't yet convinced myself of that. I see my legs and arms spread on a yellow comforter and they're beautiful. This time there are only two of me. There's the me on the bed and the me in the mirror.

We start to dance in unison; our arms start above our heads and sway to an inaudible beat. Our fingers tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. One, two, three, one, two, three. As our hands move down the sides of our bodies, our hips sway, our toes point and flex. The whole time, we're staring into each other's eyes, intentionally staying together. When I move my head to the left, she also moves her head to the left, and now our bodies are no longer in sync, but splitting away from each other. When I roll onto my side, she does too, and now we are like a fractured kaleidoscope. She looks surprised, but we both keep moving until we're sweating and our yellow comforters have fallen to our floors. Neither of us reach down to pick them up. We are no longer looking at each other, but we know that the other one is there and she is not going anywhere.

I go to the bathroom under the pretense of a shower. I strip. I start with my socks, today's are maroon with white rabbits on them. I take the left one off first and then the right. My hands unzip my skirt; push it down past my hips, my thighs, my calves. My feet kick it off. I pull my t-shirt over my head and throw it into the sink. It is a white t-shirt and I almost lose it inside the ceramic bowl. My underwear does not match my bra. I take those off too until I'm naked, we're all naked. As my naked body extends itself into space, I do not inspect, but allow my body to grow and multiply until I'm filling up the entire room. I feel full. The tile underneath my feet is cold; my nipples harden under the chill of the air. Everything is quiet. I break my own rules and touch the closest mirror to me. I touch the curve of my waist and squeeze. I hear a moan, but I'm not sure if it is coming out of my mouth or one of the infinite mouths, and how would I be able to tell the difference anyway? The moan echoes; it bounces around our bodies. I continue touching. I move closer to the mirror and put the tip of my tongue to the glass, and it feels like bubblegum. Soft, pink, sweet. Someone squeals, another giggles. The moan continues to bounce and as it moves through the room it gets deeper and more honest. Someone asks if it feels good and

someone else says, “Yes, yes it does feel good.” Another says not to stop, but I don’t think we ever planned on stopping because there’s something about the softness of our tongues and the coldness of the glass and the way we feel inside our bodies for maybe the first and only time.

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