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Erica Hu

OUR FUTURE BEFORE

未來

Erica Hu

OUR FUTURE BEFORE YESTERDAY

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To my friends

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(intro) Bookreading

most of them left during the prologue,
squeaking and quaking some 20-year-old wooden floor —
gone — I pause for a breath.
through the thinning cloud, faint light,
the smell of trees and grocery-store wine,
far off the stage, I spotted a pair of hands
steeping teabag in a camper mug,
readying himself as I exist:

Chapter One:

the stolen breath

another millisecond, second, and minute,
sinks beneath the horizon,
pilfered by the sun.

ruthless is how I am forced to remember
moments with no trace;
ruthless is another April
melts footprints down into cracks of the pavement,
where the snow looks like mud,
and mud no longer sandstone.

As words chew me up,
I become broken marks on the page —
small yet visible.

How long has it been —
the snowstorm in your eyes?
The pale white
bleeds out
a flame
that crackles
when no oxygen is left
and sojourns
in the passing cloud.
You smell of hunger
& adrenaline
& a blank canvas
raging with the unknown
— the answer to be alive,
you become.

october solitaire

i've waited months for something to fall with:
my lover's hair
on the bathroom floor;
a meteor blinking
in glorious silence;
chopsticks slipping my fingertips
when i reach for too much

i scream today's date
at every passing leaf —
“fall! it's time” —
yet everyone's become damn insensitive
when the climate is warmer than usual.

chills
are howling outside,
and i can finally make use of my passion.

At last, she whispered her man language

Fall fest / late October / urbanites sit in the pew in skinny jeans
and Dior, watching patiently the pumpkins that will never turn
into anything but pumpkins a-little-more-rotten / the kind of
contentment I felt at Lynd Farm / my friend fondles a basket of
crackers, caramel candy, and comté cheese / he points at the
array of maple syrup, and I smile / the kind of comfort in
squirrel-watching / as they cache their cheeks plump with nuts
and honey-crisp apples, we realize / it is all so simple / this
happiness, to feel full / biting down the pulp then casting the
cores out of the window of a car moving uphill, we wish to
leave behind something crunchy and good / something as good
as what we've been bestowed upon in this world / to pace
down a misty trail with no desire to see far / to pick up dead
things and learn to love them / to let them bloom in ways they
only can / even on rainy days / even with no oxygen no sun no
gaze / as the day folds and fades into the dark, I whisper to
myself / *no* / it starts as a soft denial and morphs into a desper-
ate plea / what could really free me from these thoughts
coming and fleeing? / not even knowing full well what I must
let go / what is it like to burn thinly but surely / like the wick of
a candle / oozing something so stunning and disturbingly
aromatic / to be imbibed by every lung in the room / to make
them pause and hold and gasp and daze / before being forgot-
ten again / before becoming another whisper not quite brave
enough to be heard.



银元：民国时期钱币。银质，圆形。

比现在的一元硬币大、重



名著：中外名著十余本、



顶针：钢铁做线活时戴在手中



藤编篮：存放剪刀、针线、顶针之

麦做针线活之工具



旧书：清朝民国时期出版

线装书十余本

Old Radio (Part 1)

“When the old radio stopped working,
no one knew what to do.”

“And that’s okay,” he says,
“with half a pint of *baijiu*,
I can be on my way.”

Wrinkles on his hand
grow like wild ivy on brownstone.
So at the age of eight,
I started practicing farewell.
Fearing the loss of recognition,
I take pictures of his green vest,
tai-chi shirt,
birthday cakes.

But now,
on the westward train,
I’ve lost my mind
thinking about returning
to a place with light
but no truth

and how time is an open wound
that neither bleeds nor heals.

“It’s not that bad,”
he says,
“after I close my eyes,
at least,
for the first time,
there’s no need to worry about dinner tomorrow.”

La Laguna (The Lagoon)

Who's making trouble by the shore of the lagoon?

The boy — he paddles too hard.

Eddies and waves,
arms sway with defiance.

“Hey, lady,
have you watched the leaves dance?”

His bronzed skin glistens as he turns around to point.
But I stare at his pretty face instead,

wishing we would topple over the canoe
and down
down

down

A Mother's Musings on Which I Was Fed
After "Old Wives' Tales on Which I Was Fed" by Jenny Xie

“What do you mean you are *vegan*? Are you broke? Where do you spend all your money? Do you know how hard it was for your grandparents to (insert any verb) during (insert any pre-Gen Z decade)?

Walking past dive bars, rows of lawn chairs, and students zizzing off in hammocks, she demands that universities swap place with nursing homes. Make the young *chi ku* instead.

“Why are they called *essential* oils?” She shakes her head, tinkering with the diffuser,
“They don’t *have* to be added or used. The trap of consumerism.”

“How could *I* remember? It was a long time ago. Wy don’t *you* remember your birthday?” Grunted her mom. The only person who remembered was her grandma, who died before she could ask.

Like her mother, she finishes her skincare routine in the kitchen.
Like food, youth perishes; so she stores glass jars of shimmering cream in the fridge.

A true lover of the garden thinks from the eye level of her flowers. A smirk simmers as she supervises the storm: “It’s *watering* outside.”

“I am so proud of you for who you’ve become.” She looks at me, and I, avoiding her gaze, could almost see her tears.

The Women in My Family

The women in my family
wake at dawn,
clad in shawls of a groggy sun.
Clatters and clinks,
in the kitchen, daylight sings.

The women in my family,
always catching the next departing train,
have never seen the city.
They recede into the crowd,
shoulders against shoulders,
chafing away their existence.

The women in my family —
they teach me to chase waves.
In the sea of time,
they clutch my tiny palm
and wait for the ebb tide to let go.
They know I must not stay.

The women in my family
never turn up as far and
fast as they ache for,
yet their staggers drag on,
each day, a little further.

Yet at midnight,
their armors dissolve away.
The women in my family
turn back into
mothers, daughters, and wives.
They lie in a wall-less cage,
staring at freckles on the ceiling
and swallowing,
in their cocoon nightgowns,
the unspoken words —
the weight of living.

The women in my family
whisper into my ears every night
as I drift to sleep.
“You can have everything.”

The night spearfishes my dreams.
Only their chants echo,
softly brushing the veins
of a dormant seed —
every minute,
a little longer.

我的外婆家电视旁边的柜子里

有一个白瓷观音菩萨。

外婆告诉我有什么愿望我就可以和
观音许愿。我十岁时离开去美国前
总是对着菩萨自言自语：

我的外婆外公都这么老了肯定
会比我先去世，

那到时候我要不要和他们一起死。

杨梓馨

Town

I forgot the name of my old town and the familiar dialogues tooth-missing oldtimers, whose skin was leathered by the Sun. Stories written on their faces got lost somewhere in the alleys, where peddlers used to trick kids into buying colorful cotton candy.

Grandma's cat

had gobbled its

last can of sardine

yet its languid yawn

still lingers

in my memory.

I see old phantoms

wander between

gleaming skyscrapers
and highways,

where their

homes were

buried
underneath.

(interlude) Away from Ours

From a house
I walk out.

But from a house on fire
I walk out alive — only if I could do that.

Home has no address.
Only people are its vessels
brittle-enough.
And each house hoards
reminders
that snooze but do not alter.

LANTERNS, FIREWORKS,
TEN-COURSE FEASTS,
NEW YEAR REUNIONS,
GRANDEUR, RED EVERYTHING...
NONE OF THESE MATTERS
WHEN ALL I WANT IS
to see you see me.

And all you want
is to see if I've changed.

The only thing more beautiful than a fire
is a fire-watching party.

Alone? (in Zion)

Z is heading home.
Z, you casually name her,
the lone crow gliding to and fro
casting a shadow
on the trail ahead.

Thirty miles of grandeur
on this lonely, lonely plate
is how long it takes to
grind you into a grain of sand,
a rootless leaf —
little weightless nothing.

Some things you can never forgo:
a guitar with frizzled strings,
mom's hand-knit beanie,
warm soup, wooden spoon.
Luckily, in this desert,
we are passing guests
with borrowed time,
wandering, wandering, wandering...

At dusk,
flocks of blackbirds surge the sky,
their whirlwind wings thundering
“home! home! home!”

On your knees,
you beg to be taken by their storm.

Lightning

A man slashes
the night sky,
which
turns out to be Dali's canvas
with dried paint, peeled eyes.

Being proven wrong,
he can see nothing more.

"Do we know what we know?"

Menace crawls into the room
some hold their breath, cover their eyes,
yawp and wail
until a hand turns on the light.

The end of rhetoric
is not where blaming begins.
A line goes on forever
for the infinite dots it is willing to connect.

I'd rather be a stranger
and not assume.

Lonely is

when I reach the edge of
the peninsula and don't know
the traveler next to me.
The wind sweeps over the cerulean
opening, leaving an oblivious
aftertaste.

is

the sickness of departure
with no panacea or antibodies.
I wrap a scarf around my arms
and sit by the port.
A bit of warmth for the skyline, too.

Lonely

I dream about the city when
passing Huangpu River, where once
drifted sixteen thousand dead pigs.
A lady on the train
tells me about her STDs
and a place where
she buried her fears.

the stories told in blank stares
and a gulp
of the silence
after realizing
we will not comprehend
anything
in the miles ahead.

Yellowstone

Between herds of tatanka and celestial tectonics,
my body soaks up sulfide in stillness.

Standing on meadows engulfed by Mt. Washburn,
I might as well be a strange stone,
or a beaver's puddle with bar stools.

Without recognition,
this continent is of another one.

Like rills, a thread with no ends,
I only become thinner
before meeting the ocean.

Until then.

one tiny thing (on March 26) (FRONT) / When the flowers disappear (BACK)

on my way to the store,
i saw a father taking pictures of
yellow flowers in someone's front yard.
overhead, the sun thaws his grays.

standing on the sidewalk
across the street,
i picture my grandpa
fumble for the camera button on his phone
and the sound of his calloused thumb on the screen —
the “tac, tac” followed by
“ka-churr, ka-churr.”

i smile as they turned around.

I remember passing by
the shimmering orange,
plucking as their sap stung my fingers.

But on most days,
I don't remember anything.
Even to notice is a luxury.

The rest is e n t r o p y

I saw a cat
on the chase
for her little intrigues

She vanished
into the corner
when she sensed
my gaze.

No
attention
needed.

(outro) This is History As We Know It

Morning again.

The beech outside my window dons green for another day.
Almost, it seems that sameness could outlast change.

The iris chooses light. The gaze opens wide.
My language finds no exit. If Newton was right, only the heat
slips away. Another cup of hot tea pours to the brim.

The string of lovesickness ties two ends —
my fingertip
and the imperfections that make here and now not good enough.

Galloping in his rubber boots, the mailman turns up
and dispatches the solace of a new dynasty.

“It won’t be like this forever,” the whistleblower reassures.
So we dream of the discomfort from the unknown
and pray it would be gentle to us.

Cover Calligraphy

Wei Wei

Our Future Before Yesterday

Untitled Handwriting

Elaina Zixin Yang

On the shelf next to the TV in my grandma's home
was a white porcelain Guanyin Bodhisattva.
My grandma told me if I had any wishes,
confide in the Guanyin. Before I moved to the U.S. at ten,
I always talked to myself in front of the Guanyin:
“My *wai po* and *wai gong* are so old,
they will definitely die before me.
So when the time comes, should I die with them?”

我們

ORE YESTERDAY

唐书凝

昨日