

Rongfei Mu

CREATION MYTH

a man makes a toaster
from scratch on tv, cramming
dozens of bolts and pieces
inside four iron walls. *pop!*
and out comes a single slice,
sizzled and half-burnt.
my father visits. we loiter
in a local cafe and speak
in one-syllables, sugar packets
scattered against the tablecloth
like tiny white flags. pigeons
bicker on the pavement outside,
trading breadcrumbs until
there is nothing left to hold.
i am trying to rebuild the two of us,
piece by piece, starting
from the very beginning.
when he flipped over the living room
table, i could feel the neurons being
severed midair—sizzling electricity—
as i stared into his wounded,
animalistic eyes, wondering
if it was all love had to offer.
now, he fills the silence
with nonsensical texts:
“sweetheart, i am heading
to the meeting room now”
and articles i will never need,
like ten tips to survive a hostage
situation and what to do if stuck
in a falling escalator. danger
remains the only language we share.
on the screen, a man builds
a toaster from scratch
and it takes him nine months.
i am five again, smudged against
my father in the wet grass,
waiting for him to turn on
his assembly line of stars.

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SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A VOLCANO AND A STRAWBERRY PATCH

Dedicated to the strength and struggles of Palestinian families in Gaza

somewhere between a volcano and a strawberry patch,
i rewrite the story of how everything will end—

after the bombing, the looting, the pillaging smolders out.
when the flood receded, noah must've knelt in the mud,

grateful, maybe, that even the hoping was over,
that the stillness after was not another kind of violence.

*we can go to tokyo, venice, istanbul—anywhere,
i'll take you. i'll make it up to you, ok? anywhere.*

somewhere out there, a mirror version of us drinks sunlight
straight from the air. in the distance, beit lahia's

strawberry fields ripen, a quiet sweetness festering.
i know because the scarlet witch gets to keep her children

in every universe but the real one. *it's not fair,*
you used to whisper, your body curled into mine like a comma,

back before the sky became a question i dreaded, before
a two-meter tube ran through your swollen lips to your stomach.

if god exists, he is a surgeon or a serial killer; i was only
the second to hold you, bathed in the false elegy of morning light.

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the first time it snowed buckets, you were so blind-sided
by it all
you'd asked if we were dying.
human bodies self-destruct at temperatures lower than 43 celsius,
or alternatively, when bitcoin prices
dip below 90—whichever one comes
first.
on cold mornings, in downtown beijing,
my maternal grandmother
 waits
for the heating to arrive. everything
is collectivized with the push of a button, including but not limited to:
electricity, smog, dad's toyota, and little fingers. (feel free to add more.)
they've stopped burying people in the city.
 its bad,
the committee says,
 for the vibes.
so maybe i'll be shipped off to some distant, sub-level
province
once this all blows over.
can i get a kiss before
then? can i feel the outline of your nose
again, just to memorize the side of your
 face
pressed against
mine?
funny guy, except
when you call strangers "love" and "honey"
like the entire world is sweet and caramel
and can not
hurt you.
let's talk about something else, i've already used up
my three chances to cry this
month.
 did you see the marches in moscow?
scientists have developed nukes so strong
they can nuke the nukes meant to detract other nukes.
should we stream the show
 where millionaires pay to try on a poor man's
life
 for an afternoon?
onscreen, people fought and bled to leave behind letters,

¹ Snow (pronounced xuě)

² Blood (also pronounced xuě)

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a metropolitan of sprawling monstrosities,
teeth marks in everything.
just last week, gas
surpassed benadryl as the most expensive thing to
buy.