

面子/**Save Face***a reverse abecedarian*

zeroing out the last of my history with chalk and our
yellowed bodies shudder in rigor mortis. a rusted
xyster planted deep along my cheekbone, scars tender
without lippling flesh. in this life, i will not play
victim to my genetics. the thinning blue in Mā's veins
unspools like a suture—rhythmic hacking and
the roar of the Chinatown night market, pork blood
splattered onto every syllable—the slaughter left
rotting in our lungs. iridescent koi rustling like
quarter pounder wrappers between our pruned fistfuls.
pocket change etched along palm lines like oracle bones
or loose memories; a half-eaten buffet plate sours under the
naked streetlights, peanut oil leaking by the mouthful. two
moons ago, three men ground my brother's skull into a pulp and
left me on the chopping block. i prayed on both
knees for a spare chance, spit out all my teeth, unhinged my
jaw to swallow their word like sweet rice wine. now
i scrub my tongue clean from the aftertaste of violence, steep
heirlooms until aged and bloodless, my face an empty
grin as i scour for gold crowns in this wasteland of scraps. Mā
forgets that this is what it means to be a martyr: her life
exchanged for pennies on the dollar. i raise xyster to Mā's cheekbone and
dissect my roots from her teeth. watch her secondhand youth
crumble like oracle bones to dust. so this is how it feels to
butcher a face beyond saving. so this is how it feels to be
American.

Salvation

after Eric Yip

河 [*river*]

1. A child swaddles / his baby brother / in silk / down by the shallow riverbank
2. Tobacco smeared along their gums / burning incense / a new shipment / of bad weather
3. Your father / scavenges for leftover / sunflower shells / between the empty cupboards
4. Barefoot in the alleyway / scaly tattoos / shadows encroaching a thin man
5. Jet fuel / crop dusts the sky / a jaded stomach / clutched between both hands

溺 [*to drown*]

1. Sinking under its own weight / tomb-sweeping / mourning / the boy refuses to grieve
2. Chanting on the library steps / another worker / plastered / past the windows
3. The fine china / shattered / fish mouths / scrubbed with soap / washing away / any curse
4. Splintered wood / rippling footsteps / his face left sputtering / in broken English
5. Your favorite stuffed animal / suffocating in a suitcase / arms / chucked out the window

漂 [*to float*]

1. A plastic spoon / tucked into / his back pocket / face drained / after one too many years
2. Blood resurfaces / in every dream / only for the broadcast / to forget his name
3. Moonlight / lingers beside the bed / scorched knees / dappled in your mother tongue
4. Streetlamps churning / with ink / cigarette smoke / a person like *that* / was just / asking for it
5. The bonfire asphyxiates / sparks clinging / to your red sweatshirt / as you gaze starwards

没 [*nonextant*]

1. Cracked bones / thinned into the chamber / his ashes / peppered in its afterimage
2. Rioters spilled over the netted seabed / watercolor / tampering with the evidence
3. Sweeping up each shard / crinkled newspaper / dust bunnies / fading to sepia
4. Because the bustling city / takes no pity / on those that are / this easily replaced
5. Learning to / debone gasps from prayer / and your face / left stained with salvation

Chicken Little

For someone with no name, I think of you often. It's winter now and I
gather dust like an ashtray, my face slipping in the window's sharp

curve. Another puff and the sky crumbles in slow motion—snow
dogpiling the front yard in drifts, our bodies erased by the flurry, how my heart

beat against bruises dog-eared by time. How my lips populated your blistered
hands, the softest kind of truth. Slowly, I fold myself into the space left behind:

indented pillows, frayed blankets, remembering the shape of your name. Atop the
nightstand, slumped against a bowl of rotting oranges, the landline rings one last time

and the storm rages as I feed fistfuls of my voice to the dwindling fire—thirsting
for a body to call home. Sleep comes at lightspeed, clean as a lie. I take up the

whole bed and still wake up on the wrong side. This type of quiet brings
familiarity back into the equation: limp bodies rising like cigarette smoke,

their faces hazy. Fuming. The light skinned across the floorboards at an
abstract angle. Yet I'd go back in a heartbeat. I am not lost but still always

searching, even after the dryer finishes its last round, after the snow settles
and dust bunnies writhe like leeches between my threaded fingers. What remains

of our past falls to natural selection: gone but never, never forgotten.