

Ling:

*Ling hordes fake eyelashes:*

Each time—  
he'd yell,  
    bite, tear, kick,  
    fight, fit, Ling  
                    whisked her eyelash  
                    to blow a whispered wish  
with her wet,  
quivering lips  
                    and watch the wind  
                    bewitch her prayers.

When Ling was five:  
    Mother's left ring finger was  
sliced, severed—  
    in her husband's  
fury of fight,  
    god forbid her flight.  
She clenches  
    her jaw, she bites.  
She shuts  
    her eyes, she fights.  
    until her father finally sleeps at night.  
    And her mother cuddles sleeping Ling like a  
spoon- cocoon,  
    intricately braiding  
    sweet, sweet, sweet  
    lies:  
    *He loves you, Ling*  
    *He loves you, Ling*

*Ling traces X's on her collarbone:*

*Because, she tells me. In high school,*  
    she smoked weed and felt free  
    applied mousse to her ribbon-laced hair,  
changed her name, *Lina* to "fit" in,  
    *(whatever that even means)*  
    met this guy, fell for his eyes  
*Blue like a chambray tidal wave*  
    *they looked like a never-ending sea.*  
    *Funny how infinity can only be seen by the mind*  
*and how versatile it can be* .  
    In her kitten heel pumps,

in his worn out chuck taylors,  
they waltzed in the parking lot.

*It felt like eternity (in a good way)*

He walked her home,

lightly traced her collarbone

*(She still feels the shivers and tingles)*

***Ling takes off her left hand wedding ring before she sleeps:***

She said she loves my hipbones most.

(No, I don't understand either)

And the way I scribble red pen poetry

all over my body.

*Why, she asked for the first time*

*Because your body's different from your mind;*

*inscribe lines in your skin*

*and feel the dimension of each word,*

*It sinks straight to your heart*

*placates the inner animal inside.*

*Too deep- it's time to sleep, she mumbles*

And, bodies beside each other

I let her set the rhythm:

*breathe in,*

*breathe out —*

I know every night at 3

she'll wake up

clawing or

yanking

her left ring finger

and I'll recite:

*I love you, Ling*

*I love you, Ling*

*I love you, Ling*

*Please believe I'm not lying.*

*(but that last li(n)e is for me)*

## Thirty-Thousand Seas, A Sestina

In GuiLin, on the rice paddies of honey-haze June, starry horizons spit and swill the waning shore, and the soft slab mud swallows both feet whole. I begin to dig alongside my grandfather as he recounts his youth of tea trees, opium-dreams, and honeysuckle seas: *It rained thirty-thousand years straight to fill the oceans, would you believe?*

These tea trees taught him to breathe through roots, upwards from his feet. Believing the whispers of wishbone beggars<sup>1</sup>, in his youth, he smoked opium: swallowed the stars, losing himself in the dead black-amnesias of heaven's sea. *Pupils clouded with veils of flimsy film<sup>2</sup>, sticky scents of soft heliotrope and rice wine, I'll never forget that feeling May.* He calls me May, as I've forgotten my Chinese name. Letting his words sink in silence, I begin

to dig again: *You can learn about flooding that way* - the beginning of dawn bleeds ephemeral colors you can't believe.

We'll find the rice fields in the ridges of my grandfather's fingertips. *You can learn about the speed of light-* he says, study the stars: flashlight kaleidoscopes swirling in fractal cracks. And *We can begin to fade-* it's soft like spooling your tongue around *Nian Gao*, steady like the Infinite seas.

Before I return six time zones to home, we travel to the edge of the sea.

When the bus driver asks why I can't read Chinese, I'll say nothing. Picking the last seat, I begin to trace the story that needs to be told on cracked, foggy window screens - *Mei, Mei, Mei*. Softly, I trace the characters of my given name: 美, 美, 美. Make-believe names just don't trace and palpitate the same - *May, Mei, 美*. We follow the brightest star down the trail of sand to my

favorite view of opulent seas. My grandfather told me her name only once- 明清远, - clear, like mine.

Listening to the cadence of waves, why did she choose this shore?

Perhaps, in her youth and heedless of stasis, followed the azimuth of the stars,

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<sup>1</sup> Baveja, Hanel. "Scholastic Art and Writing Gold Medal Portfolio Reading Ceremony." Reading transcript, The Parson's New School, New York, NY, June 7, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. This poem was inspired from Hanel Baveja's poem *Lessons from Monsoon Season*

entranced by the infinity within the waves. Perhaps her inner demons seduced her, beginning  
to braid sweet, sweet lies that she believed,  
wholeheartedly. The sea swallowed my great-grandmother whole, singing soft

lullabies that she followed into the soft, soft, soft,  
caress of the waves. Look up- the night sky dissolves in ianthine, for yours and my  
eyes only. Just for tonight, let us believe  
that escaping oblivion is possible within seas,  
that fading is just the beginning  
to an immortalized reliquary in the stars.

Mesmerized by celestial aerialists that map the cloud atlas in stars,  
I walk the thirty-thousand miles home barefoot, breathing up from the soles of my feet. And I begin  
to recite my name: 美, 美, 美.                      明清远, Tell them to throw my ashes into the sea.

## Binded, Blinded

i.

Let roots break free:

that first summer shower in June, your mother  
taught you to cultivate aciphylla leaves, the fine rainfall

saturating dry—

New York soil an auburn maroon,  
lifting scents of honeyed, raw mulch.

From plastic-prisons

with potted plants, pull them head first  
the bound roots packed compact with soil—

crippled, crammed, crooked, cracked.

You touched it tender, afraid to mar sacred shoots,  
Count each vein and strand in those coiled roots,

Contrived ends—

winding endlessly- transfixion by the orchid roots' infinity,  
*how fragile, how tamed.*

ii.

In Guilin, Grandmother nested her garden,  
pocketed for safekeeping, in corners of the bedroom:  
the bare saracena lily behind the smeared windowsill,  
amber amaryllis and azure anemones line the antique bed frame.

*"Your grandmother's feet can't  
touch the ground. Don't ask, don't touch, don't stare."*

Honey-haze June oozed by, trickling  
towards that black-sky morning on the first of July  
my grandmother's bandages suddenly slip off,

iii.

lethal lead flakes of off-white cloth unveil:

toes curled in like

a clipped bird's wing,

bones protruding

like snapped twigs:

crippled, crammed,

crooked, cracked.

I screamed before

I heard her cry:

scrambling to

rebind her feet,

muffling her

piercing sobs, she

meekly recites, repeatedly apologizes:

I'm so sorry, Mei  
I'm so sorry, Mei.