
POETRY | SPRING 2024

Pediatric Hemisectomy

By Angela Tang-Tan

There's bad luck and then
there's a five-year-old boy who
goes down at the 4th of July parade:
no gunshot, he just goes down.

In the CT scanner they find a bullet
lodged in his fourth ventricle. Turns out
someone shot a gun into the air clear on
the other side of LA and the bullet
went straight up to cold blue heaven
then down into a little boy's brain.
You wonder why God didn't catch it.

A freak accident, the neurosurgeons say,
scribbling kinematic equations on a
patient list to try to estimate the force
of the bullet falling at terminal velocity.
There's a little hole in his forehead
and they need to make a big hole.
Decompress. Prevent herniation.

All I remember is the hum of the razor,
the smell of vomit crusting the boy's lips.
his hair falling into a halo around his head.

Angela Tang-Tan is a third-year medical student at Keck School of Medicine of USC. She graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 2020 with a dual degree in Neurobiology and Psychology before becoming an ambulance EMT during the COVID-19 pandemic. She plans to pursue a residency in neurosurgery. Another poem by Tang-Tan, "Code OB," appears in the Spring 2024 Intima.

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