

TO US & OURS

AN ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINIST COLLECTION



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ABOUT

This collection of writing emerges from the 2021 Asian American Feminist Writing Workshop hosted by Kundiman and the Asian American Feminist Collective. This workshop fostered a space for writers to explore how the unique histories and themes of Asian American feminism influences their own work. Learn more at www.kundiman.org/feminist-writing-archive.

The **Asian American Feminist Collective** engages in intersectional feminist politics and seeks to foster dialogue that explores the intersections of Asian/American identity through media-making, creative practices, and political education workshops.

WEBSITE

www.asianamfeminism.org

INSTAGRAM

[@aafc.nyc](https://www.instagram.com/aafc.nyc)

TWITTER

[@aafcollective](https://twitter.com/aafcollective)

Kundiman is a national organization dedicated to nurturing generations of writers and readers of Asian American literature. They create a space where Asian Americans can explore, through art, the unique challenges that face the new and ever changing diaspora.

WEBSITE

www.kundiman.org

INSTAGRAM

[@kundimanforever](https://www.instagram.com/kundimanforever)

TWITTER

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danny ryu is a writer and healer. Their poetry echoes through themes of interconnectedness, memory, grief, (dis)integration, and being somewhere-in-between.

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goeun (b. Busan, Korea) is a writer of letters, essays, software, and stories. She writes about midwestern landscapes, undocumented upbringings, and tentative technologies.

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Promiti Islam is a Bangladeshi writer and educator based in New York City. She is a recipient of the 2020 Kundiman Mentorship Lab Fellowship in Creative Non-Fiction.

DANDELION SPELL (FOR SAFETY)

CHING-IN CHEN WEBSITE — www.chinginchen.com

for Huiying B. Chan



1. *a buzz in pool*

don't know what *flame*
to be spilt *circling*
from your seedlings

you told only
sliver once what *command*
to live with stern *center*
we all

tornado father
a house set against *fall into*
lingering *support*

2. may you & your
sunlights grow
sturdy & seed

& light-winged return *Tall stalk*
to moon & water & sun again

my body once passed *to trick intruders*

a bridge *wasn't authorized but*

i worried *cut off*
i'd stay stuck *from central*

we draw bits

without a shadow

and re-assemble

3. *thin line holding*

together later pleasure you used
to delay *a preservation* *a storing*

soft lines *we aren't*

of one mind sweat first

then joy if at all

4. *one says we need a clear*

demarcation may you

& your questions bloom *another says*

stretch and we can
make room & receive

what you sprout in abundance

5. to become bird

trust your own radiant steady turn
your back

on what's gold your own
cherish sky

turning back will reveal cartilage and soft tissue left between fractures

turning back *ask for what you need again*

your own flown spore

root water & thirst *you say carry me*
to that memory place *that place I fell*
then I cleansed in water

cleansed again *nothing seems*

sway & sway

to help

&

Wakashu and
Lost Traditions



Immersing myself in the world of
Japanese woodblock prints . . .



I looked carefully for
the wakashu,
a third
gender of
the Edo period
(1600s-1850s).



Japanese youth who were
neither men or women,
occupying a unique space
in this moment of time.



The wakashu seamlessly blend into
these intricate prints.

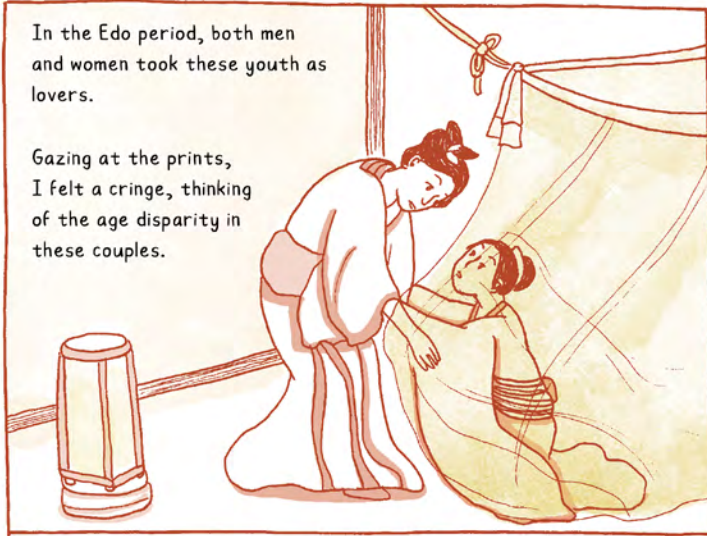


Distinguishing wakashu from men
and women is a
challenging task.



In the Edo period, both men and women took these youth as lovers.

Gazing at the prints, I felt a cringe, thinking of the age disparity in these couples.



But also a sort of satisfaction in imagining the queer romances and sexualities that existed in these times and even before the Edo period.



It is jarring to then remember that the current Japanese government and people are known for their homophobia and strict patriarchy.

Japan changed in many ways when Commodore Perry's dark ships appeared on the horizon.



In the 1860s, Japan underwent "modernization," adopting the technology, cultural ideas, and militarism from the West.



Following the West, the Japanese government made homosexuality a crime in the 1870s.

I wonder what kind of collective memory exists in Japan for the wakashu.

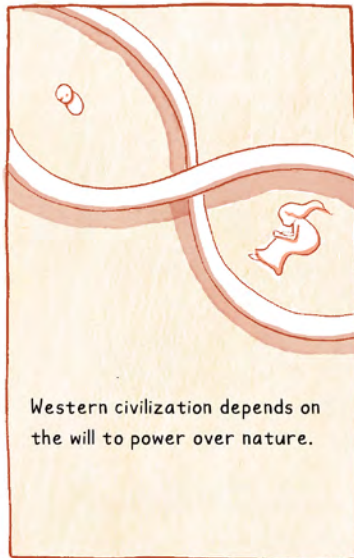


And other queer Japanese people, their traditions and history.



How much has been lost

with the cultural, ideological, and military dominance of the Western empire over the world?



Inscribing biological differences with social meaning.

Western civilization depends on the will to power over nature.

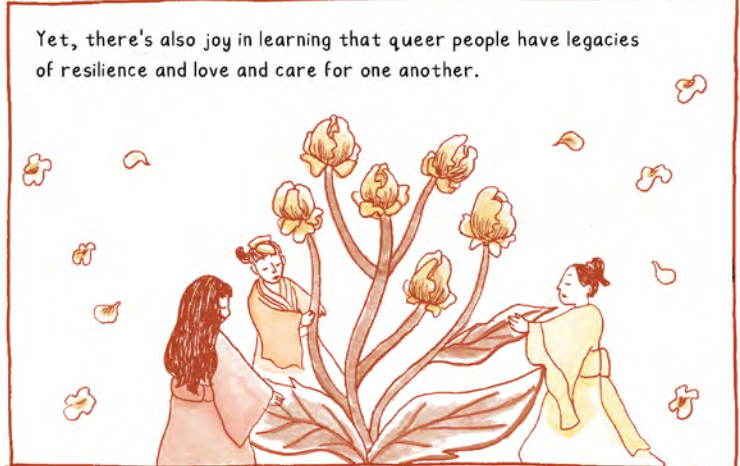
For a lot of people, it's hard to break free of the idea that gender is fixed, essentialist, inherent in human nature and biology.



I sometimes wonder if it's pointless to study the stories and lives of queer people from hundreds of years ago.

There's so much grief, thinking of the repression that people experienced living under the patriarchy and Western imperialism.

Yet, there's also joy in learning that queer people have legacies of resilience and love and care for one another.



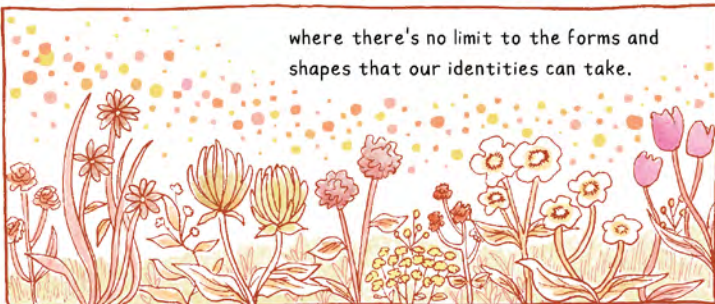
I believe



there are other worlds



where there's no limit to the forms and shapes that our identities can take.



I think I can hear our ancestors rejoicing at our eventual victory over Man, our overturning of the social order.



TO THE DAUGHTERS OF WAR

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We do not come from America.

The Americans taught me that I come from a dead people. That children of war—especially daughters of war—are the perennial victims (of “authoritarian dictatorships”/of our own people's liberation wars) who need to become rehabilitated as Americans to be worthy of life. The American liberals will teach you that you come from a pitiful people deserving survival, at best. But, war child, your people's foremothers also came from revolution. Your foremothers were not American.

The daughter of war who forgets her place in this war waits for U.S. imperialism to strike at home and forgets the ways it is already here. You(r people) are still at war, child. When they tell you the history

of how your people died, they try to teach away your rage, sever you from the story of how you were coerced/forced here, make you dependent on America. Make you believe America is your country too, that the American settler-colonial project is yours too, that their governance is capable of reform with your hands too. The American fixation on the postmortem as a form of American currency feeds off of your stagnation.

I come from my Mother.

My mother did not want me to write her and her people like the victims the Americans would have, like they did not fight too. My maternal side left Cambodia at a time in which the United States, in pursuit of repressing and eliminating the anti-imperialist Việt Cong, decimated the rich Mekong delta... the Americans made sure “every goddamn thing that can fly goes into Cambodia and hits every target that is open,” while arming the adventurist Khmer Rouge in genocide. To scapegoat their efforts, the U.S. deliberately wrote off the genocide as a consequence of the “communist” Khmer Rouge regime (when in reality they were not) to further scapegoat what was encouraged by U.S. desecration.

The American liberals will never teach you that the U.S. war in the Pacific—once cut in half the heart of Korea, twice used the same strategy on Việt Nam, Laos and Kampuchea—was and is rooted in U.S. containment of Global South proletariat uprisings. Where

the peoples' uprisings converged across Asia, Latin America, and Africa and drove away the EuroBritish delineations of colonization in an earlier stage of capital accumulation, the Americans, adept in “neo”-imperialism, became the global hegemon with liberalism as its base ideology. The capitalist endeavor to cease the



¹ Nixon's order to Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State

proliferation of the Communist Party of China's victory and "the Red Tide," after all, undergirded the Cold War.

That the 1975 Immigration Act (Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act) depended on the U.S.' cruel colonization and conversion of Guam, Thailand, the Philippines, into territory for which the United States would use for military bases and launchpads, Rest & Recreation sites, the sex trade, sites to close down on their targets in China, Korea, and more...

That anti-communism as co-constituent anti-proletariat and anti-Black set the grounds for the founding of the CIA, of the Special Forces, of the FBI & COINTELPRO to contain the internationalist formation of the Black, Indigenous revolutionary left in the belly of the beast, to disperse their revolutionary potential and leadership...

That early deportations in the U.S. meant the dispersion of political prisoners and students in the U.S. protesting the genocide of their peoples at home...

That the enemy—was and continues to be U.S. imperialism, not simply as "another" system, but as the principal contradiction of struggle today.

What is a War, when did it start and when will it end?

You talk about war so often, you have forgotten which war you speak of. War in Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois' terms redeveloped the Leninist argument for war as a precipitant of world capitalism to mean a foundationally ongoing, racialized capital accumulative process.² War that follows militarization requires economic sanctioning, trade

² See scholarship from Dr. Charisse Burden-Stelly

and enforced impoverishment, coup d'états via CIA interference, and relies on the lure of the propaganda machine—to turn peoples of a nation against themselves to crush any and all alternative political economies to neocolonial dependence on this U.S. monstrosity. It is the same war that plagues China, Cuba, the Philippines, Syria, the DPRK, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine, and Haiti that enforces coups over the socialist states of Venezuela and Bolivia, that usurped communist leaders of the people in Indonesia, Algeria, Timor-Leste, Burkina Faso... AFRICOM, the U.S. Pivot to the Pacific, the Pax-Americana, the War on Terror, the War on Drugs, the War against the "Axis of Evil"—there are too many names for it. This war-imperialism has not ended.



So when you lose your foremother to ~~war~~ imperialism, you will learn the lesson: that the "conferral" of liberation, in U.S. terms, can only look like the (slow) death of your people, seeped red in your foremothers' blood with what the U.S. calls their "democracy," their "love." You will learn, like the armed anti-imperialist women from your motherland's, that the triumph of your liberation must look like the end of the United States of America, returned to Turtle Island protectors. The U.S. empire—in action—U.S. capitalism-imperialism, is the **primary** contradiction of your foremothers' struggle.

What is a Revolution, when did it start and when will it end?

My grandmother and my mother were not militants, but I know that they raised me to be one. "Don't believe everything they tell you, kon." When you dare to ask where the remnants of your foremother's insurgence have gone, you will be led to the conclusion that they have not. Perhaps the most sophisticated aspect of capitalist-imperialist war, in my argument, is how it projects a farcical

stalemate to those who survive it. It, to the diaspora, dismantles the materiality of the collective colonized people's liberation for the lure of liberal, temporal, non-violent conflict resolution or aesthetic reform. For the Southeast Asian daughter, it dislodges and conceals the capacity to revolt, to claim a legacy imbued with the most lethal kind of movement work: anti-imperialist organizing.



“You don't know what it is like to live in war,” where revolution—not rebellion—is anything but a choice. Where organized, enmassed action is a duty. A revolution, in its basic form, does not come from the desire to obliterate meaninglessly like the Americans like to make out of us, but the love for life so strong it looks like cadres of militant peoples defending their people from genocide with whatever it is they have. They say that wherever there is oppression there is resistance. But the means of your resistance to terminate the systems that live off of your oppression, will determine your liberation. The principles that directed your foremothers' practices in pursuit of communism were not the evil, but their means of liberation. *Remember that when they tried to wage genocide on us, we fought back with revolution. In Việt Nam, the Amerikan imperialists were defeated... and this was a resounding victory to those in Cuba, in China, and across the development of the socialist states.*

Never forget that you are a child of that too.

So here, my battlescars, read like this instead:

In the 1960s, the imagery of armed Việt, Lao, and Cambodian women resonated across the world and converged with the militancy of liberation forces involving women in socialist economic restructuring in Korea, the women in the Cuban Armed Forces, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the armed women in Mozambique. Where capitalist militarization and orientalism would reduce Asian women to commodified sexuality, it was their methods and principles that were capable of defeating the American imperialists. Southeast Asian liberation fighters exemplified the possibilities of diverging from the U.S. and forced the world to reckon with militancy as a politically proletarian feminist practice.

If your foremother could teach you, she'd tell you the Việt, Lao, and Cambodian women were resolute in their power to defend their nation against the French, Japanese, and the Americans—playing more roles than any man could. Under French colonization, the Indochinese Communist Party's women wrote to each other in newspapers and drafted poetry, took informal classes with anti-colonial fighters, studied from Chinese revolutionary fighters, wrote independence theories, and opposed the fundament of capital—the fetish of private property relations displaced onto their bodies—and studied patriarchy not as a cultural asset but as a historically accumulative system co-constitutive of class society. Revolt was not new to them. When the U.S. intervened, the first anti-imperialist women were peasant youth struck by poverty due to colonization and cut off from the produce of their land who were first able to read, write, grow their own food, and also maintain access to land and cease feudal patriarchal relations under the Việt Minh's policies. The formation of the Việt Minh in the 1940s, after all, called for 'people first, weapons later.' Cadres like the Long-Haired Army were trained in the study of how to get the people free, where anti-imperialism would embed itself in the versatility of Việt and Lao women in largely underground activities—education, intelligence, and supply. You should know that when they studied in underground bunkers, set up as night classes often lit by a single flickering candle, and practiced the words of Hồ Chí Minh, 毛泽东 (Mao Ze Dong), Lenin,

Marx and more, women worked as traveling school teachers, workers and guards to grow the revolutionary potential of the youth. Known for their ability to emotionally maneuver interrogation, they feigned innocence to their advantage. For example, women working to clean the military barracks once stole coffins full of ammunition without the U.S.' awareness tricked U.S. troops with bamboo shoots and fireworks disguised as sniper guns to steal and feed the masses truckloads of rice. In the renowned victory of Điện Biên Phủ, which military strategist Võ Nguyên Giáp recognizes was pivotal to the Việt victory over the French-U.S., it is said women played a pivotal role in compelling women fighting for the French to join the Vietnamese People's Army on the ground.

She'd tell you that women cadres in Việt Nam and Laos socialized childcare and schooling for youth and created avenues for self-sustenance, trained in sowing rice fields, agricultural and communes maintenance, as well as developed strategy. When in the Tiger Cages, women sat and hummed songs only they knew; it was political theory, history, guerilla, poetry and mutual study that sustained their collective spirit. Under imprisonment and torture, it is said that men were the first to give in, whilst the women were the last. Women were responsible for the sustenance of revolution as a communal, long-term project, ensuring that people were fed, taught, trained, and nourished in the belly, head, *and* heart.

And after all of this, she'd ask you: what first made you think you had to filter your words like that, hang your head low like that? Made you think your sentences were either too heavy or too light, made you want to wash your body off of things that they told you made you weak? Made you blame you and your own for what you could not forsake, could not afford... So much so you tried to make yourself fit the hand of the imperialists...

I come from my Mother.

I like to imagine my late grandmother's kitchen—lit up by the sun, in its warmest hour, at the point—right before it sets, in which everything looks gently on fire and my grandmother's skin is as golden as I last remember it. She peels away at chestnuts, sitting in the same clothes

she wove herself for the factories after resettlement. She still smells like 4 AM-made donuts from the donut shop and Chinese herbs... When the grief in our lives feels quieter for once—not gone, just quiet. And the world feels warm.

I like to imagine this is where my grandma sits in her time now away from earth... hopefully, forgiven me for everything I did not get to do for her, for everything I didn't know...

Where I know I am her granddaughter, I try to read her from the cracks in the palms of her hands, the long silences standing in between rumors she heard about Mao Ze Dong (versus the American capitalists), when she could not read or write. When I ask her if she knew of Issarak women in Cambodia or the guerilla women in Viet Nam, I tell her how badly I wanted to know we were more than refugee poems and American toys. And she just murmurs:

You come from Love.

Your foremothers love you. Your people love you, con.

Don't let them tell you we were just made of death.

I write this so we know the way militant women raised us in their history.

I write this so you know that there has always been a way out—and it is against—the monstrosity of U.S. imperialism.

I write this to fill you with love, so that one day children of war will no longer have to make sense of life through death.

Your love was deliberate, so is mine.



FIG TREE

MAT

WEBSITE — www.postcardsfrommat.com

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In their first home, there was so much space. The space represented decisions to be made. What colors would adorn their life? What textures would greet them on their floor and couch? Where would their eyes be drawn? At first they were consumed with the images of other people's homes, inspiring envy and greed. They wanted a dresser. They wanted home to be a finished product. They wanted to invite people in who could feel safe in the underground world they'd cultivated.

But when the pandemic came, the world they were cultivating became for them alone. They were not meant to invite bigots in from their local bike community, or white nurses whom they'd once considered family. They were not to assume familiarity and trust with the BIPOC folks in their life whom they hadn't lived through hardship with. They were not meant to allow tinder dates in. They would not fuck people they did not trust in their home.

With only themselves as witness, their home begged for slowness. It asked that they not force it into something it didn't want to be. Their home asked only that they browse, touch, feel, what was alive. Their home asked to be filled with color, decadence, heat.

Their home made them close the tabs on decorating websites and instead peruse thrift stores for gold, gold mirrors and frames and figures. Their home asked them to bring earth inside. One day, they spotted a fig tree. A fig tree in Alaska. Why not, they said. The fig tree quickly rooted and grew. They were made fun of by zoom tinder dates who thought it strange to bring a Mediterranean plant into the freezing rainforest of the North. But these dates were not

whom they had been charged to tend. So they abandoned the apps and tended Fig.

As Fig's roots grew, they remembered picking fruit from the trees of California's coastal cities and saying to their boyfriend at the time, "I never want to stop traveling, but I'll know I'm home when I plant a fruit tree."

Since then, they've been surrounded by plants clarifying air and turning toward the sun, sprouting new leaves in winter contrary to what the internet says is possible, rooting new threads. These plants talk to them and teach them; by curling their leaves and drying their soil, by flowering, by drooping and decaying.

These plants are sometimes forgiving, surviving their erratic sleep schedule and long trips away. They're taking their time, tending, not trying to fill the empty space, but allowing their leaves to unfurl slowly.

NIGHTSWIMMING IN AUGUST

ALYSSA CRUZ

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Mama said, wear your wig, or else people might think you're a boy. I didn't wanna be a boy. But why would people think I'm a boy?

Auntie said, wear your wig, or else people might think you're gay. I didn't wanna be gay. But what's so wrong with being gay?

When I kissed a woman for the first time, I knew it was hair that held me back.

Because after just one kiss—I finally understood what Mama and Auntie,

and maybe everyone else, feared: kissing women makes you brave. But not just any kind of brave. Kissing women makes you the kind

of brave that rips off your purple armband floaties in preschool swim class. The kind of brave that jumps to the 4th monkey bar

even though you broke your arm trying to reach the 3rd. The kind of brave that doesn't wait three days to text after a first date.

When I kiss her, I know what I'm getting away with.

MASTURBATION, PLEASURE & FEMINIST POLITICS

FATEMA HAQUE

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I feel horny and want to get off.

Do I have time, space, and privacy to masturbate? If I have children, will they interrupt me? If I am partnered, can I communicate to my partner(s) that I need alone time? If I live in a joint family or share space with a sibling or an elder, are there safe and private spaces?

These considerations may seem obvious: doesn't everyone need time, space, and privacy to masturbate? Yes, but how time and attention are allocated is gendered and women typically carry a heavier load of responsibilities. We serve as primary caretakers to the point where children will turn to us, the sisters, mothers, grandmothers, and aunties, even if their brothers, fathers, grandfathers, and uncles are in the same room—a reality of living in a world that reinforces the gender binary at every turn.

We are further socialized to not take time for ourselves, so requesting alone time can activate feelings of selfishness and anxiety, like we are not doing enough or doing something wrong by desiring such time. We might experience an impending sense of doom, and the act

of communicating our needs can be more effort than the rewards of meeting them. Conceding to others' demands for our labor can be the path of least resistance. Therefore, simply finding space and time to masturbate can be tedious. These negotiations and acts of resistances make masturbation a complex site of feminist praxis.

Say I manage to navigate the anxiety and communication hurdles and secure or create space. Then, how do I get off? What's the source material of my fantasy? Am I creating my own (which takes more time)? Am I relying on pornography? If I am, how do I feel about what's available? Popular porn, particularly free porn, is full of sexism, misogyny, and subtle and overt rape culture. It's ableist, racist, and fatphobic. Finding erotic material that doesn't make us feel complicit in our own oppression and activate feelings of self-betrayal that frustrate, disgust, or shut us down can feel futile.

Say I manage to find pornography that doesn't set off all the alarms in my head and is stimulating. How long can I stay engaged with the fantasy? Does my focus shatter because I'm thinking about the size, shape, race, or gender of the actor(s) on screen? If the actors are BIPOC, how are they being treated in the scene? Are they being exoticized, dehumanized, maltreated, or disrespected? Are they fat? Are they skinny? Who are they having sex with and how are their partner(s) being gendered, racialized, objectified, or otherwise portrayed? Most women require at least 12 minutes of uninterrupted mental and physical stimulation in order to orgasm, and when we use "content outside our own imaginations and memories to feed into the steam engine of our desire"¹ and that content clashes with our feminist values, we can be drawn out of the moment and out of pleasure.

If I am also a survivor of sexual trauma, which is likely given that 1 in 6 American women are,² am I prepared to be potentially triggered by what I see? Can I wade "the heavier seawater [of] our much defended rape culture, which is fed by fantasies of incest, rape, coercion,

¹ brown, adrienne maree. *Pleasure Activism*, p. 225

² RAINN. "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics." <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>

³ brown, adrienne maree. *Pleasure Activism*, p. 222.

boundary transgression, force, transaction, and scenarios where the masculine wields power over the feminine”?⁵ So much can come up from the very act of searching for erotic material; yet more from acting on the desire elicited by said material.

Do I know that I have a body? Can I stay in that body long enough to experience pleasure? Many of us, particularly those of us who have survived gender violence, disassociate from our bodies during sex. We “temporarily separate or split off from [our] body...sliding out of the present moment, losing a sense of physical identity or emotional connection”⁴ and this response becomes habitual over time, compromising pleasure.

Say I manage to move past all these impediments and get on with the task at hand: getting off. Maybe I orgasm; maybe I don't, but I've enjoyed myself anyway. What happens after?

Do I close out the tabs or windows, close the lid of my computer?

Do I get on with life, satisfied with the moment I was able to carve out for myself?

Or do I linger, pause, luxuriate on the bed (assuming I'm not interrupted and have the privacy)?

Do I stretch, take a bath, clean up? Do I drink a glass of water or have a snack? Maybe I nap.

Or maybe I crash and crash hard. Maybe I enter into a shame spiral, feeling worthless, guilty, or wrong about my actions and fantasies. What was I taught by family, religious leaders, or the media about masturbation? If I used toys and have been taught messages about virginity and the value of a woman, can I reconcile these things? What if what I fantasized about clashes with my feminist values, and what felt good in the moment doesn't feel so good afterward? How do I escape the pit of shame? Do I turn to mindless scrolling through social media to distract from these feelings?

What happens a day later or throughout the week? Do I revisit the moment of intimacy in the way I might recall a great night with a lover? Or do I continue to shove it down, shame, guilt, maybe even regret ruling? Do I feel “lost, ungrounded, disconnected, unsatisfied, depressed, irritable, vulnerable, raw, sad”?⁵

This scenario, while drawn out to consider a wide range of experiences, represents the ways in which our upbringing, values, and politics can be in conflict with how we seek out and experience pleasure. At times, such endeavors can lead to internal conflicts, self-judgment, shaming, and possible retraumatization in the case of survivors of gender-based violence. How do we reduce these harms and bring our masturbatory practices in alignment with our (feminist) values? What do we have to learn and unlearn? What practices should we start or stop in order to experience pleasure without shame?

To answer these questions, we might consider what we can learn from kink culture. Kink, which includes BDSM practices, role play, and fantasies, demands that the implicit be made explicit. Participants plan scenes carefully, working through everything from how they will address each other to safe words or actions that can stop, slow down or change the scene. They negotiate the use of tools (paddles, whips, blindfolds, etc.) and the level of intensity. They consider what happens after a scene concludes, how the participants want to be treated or cared for. In discussing acts that are overtly about power, even

⁴ Maltz, Wendy. *The Sexual Healing Journey: A Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*, p. 146.

⁵ Sprott, RA and Randall A. “Black and Blues: Sub Drop, Top Drop, Event Drop and Scene Drop. *Journal of Positive Sexuality* vol. 2. November 2016.

consensual non-consent play is negotiated in advance with clearly defined exit strategies should things need to change.

Kink's demand for clarity can teach us how to become clear about our own expectations when it comes to masturbation. If we were to sit down with ourselves and have an honest, vulnerable conversation about what turns us on (or off), how we masturbate, what we experience when we masturbate, what we believe and how we feel about masturbation, we can learn much about ourselves. We can journal about past experiences of masturbation: what worked, what didn't; what brought us out of the moment and what heightened the experience; what we felt in the moment, how we felt afterward, how we feel now. We might consider where our feelings originate, if there are things we want to unlearn.

Reflecting on our experiences of masturbation can help us come into alignment with our values. We might decide that there are things we can change to reduce shame or guilt the next time we masturbate. If we use porn, for example, we could consider finding feminist porn that better reflects our values, has more variety in the types of bodies engaged in sexual activities, that doesn't perpetuate rape culture, and treats actors/sex workers with dignity and fairness. We could also create what adrienne maree brown calls "self-pornography" and "decolonize [our] desire" by "learn[ing] to desire [ourselves], [our] body, [our] skin, [our] rhythms, [our] pleasure."⁶

If we are concerned about digital security or just want a more analog version of self-pornography, we can try what Louise Hay calls "mirror work." The basic premise of mirror work is to look at our reflection and positively affirm what we see. In the context of decolonizing our desires, we could affirm what we find attractive about our bodies, dance in front of the mirror (clothing optional) to familiarize ourselves with how our bodies move, or masturbate in front of the mirror so that we learn to be turned on by the color, curves, folds, and markings of our own body. The visual feedback could also enhance our capacity to

⁶ brown, adrienne maree. *Pleasure Activism*, p. 118

stay in our bodies if we have a tendency to dissociate. In a world where only a limited number of bodies are deemed desirable and worthy, these small acts are radical.

Reflection may also clue us in on the state of our imagination. How capable are we of creating a rich fantasy life? Has our imagination been stunted by ableist, racist, cisheteropatriarchal narratives of desire? Fantasies are safe spaces to explore desire and try out things we're curious about. And what we fantasize about can tell us a lot about what we need to unlearn in order to come into alignment with our values. An active imagination and rich fantasy life can be built continuously over time, not just when we're masturbating. We can practice daydreaming while doing the dishes or taking a walk. We can create plot and emotional backing to our fantasies so that when we do use it during masturbation, it is a deeply familiar and pleasurable place, one in which we are centered, valued, desired.

There are other things we can learn from kink culture. The experience of kink includes physical and psychological states called subpace, subdrop, topdrop, scenedrop, and eventdrop. Subpace has been described as "the ever-subjective mental and emotional state of floating, calm, or even euphoria brought on by the adrenaline and endorphins triggered by BDSM."⁷ Others have described it as "temporary impairment of the brain's executive function capability accompanied by feelings of floating, peacefulness, time distortion, and living in the here and now."⁸ While not an exact parallel, masturbation can also lead to moments where we set aside our worries and anxieties, stay fully engaged with the moment and sensations we are experiencing, and buy into a fantasy (whether created by our own imagination or something we are seeing/reading/hearing). This can, in turn, release endorphins and feelings of pleasure, a momentary high.

⁷ Davis, Davey. "BDSM and Aftercare: How to Support the Tops and Dops in Your Life." 28 July 2018. <https://www.them.us/story/bdsm-aftercare-tops-doms>

⁸ Sagarin, Brad. "Never tried BDSM? Go on, it's good for you." 9 February 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/09/bdsm-good-for-you-fifty-shades-of-grey-relationship>

Subdrop has been described as being “suddenly overwhelmed by a wave of shame,”⁹ a “letdown, emotional downturn or crash.”¹⁰ This drop can be immediate or extend out into days “with an emotional reaction or state that can involve guilt, anxiety, melancholy, or exhaustion.”¹¹ Topdrop, scenedrop, and eventdrop are similar psychological (and possibly physiological) crashes. If applied to masturbation, this concept could be parallel to the internal conflicts we can experience either during or after masturbation because our actions are not aligned with our values. For example, we might feel shame for enjoying pornography that perpetuates coercive narratives or that has ambiguous consent.

Subdrops (or any other type of drop) are common and normal occurrences. Kink practitioners do try to reduce the impact of drops by engaging in aftercare. Aftercare can look like many things: taking care of physical needs, like cleaning up, drinking water/rehydrating, eating a granola bar or a banana, and tending to bruises or wounds from the activities. It includes soothing diversions that enhance intimacy, like cuddling, scenting each other, and affectionately stroking each other’s hair or back. It can involve communication, asking how the other person is doing, providing verbal affirmations, and checking in (e.g., “That was so sexy. How do you feel?” or “I really enjoyed myself. Did you?”). It may also incorporate naps and a safe (mental and physical) space to do so. Similar acts can provide nourishment and ease after masturbation: curling up under the covers, telling ourselves, “That was hot,” enjoying a piece of chocolate, taking a nap. Recognizing that we can never fully predict how a sex act will leave us feeling, no matter how proactive we are about knowing ourselves and what we enjoy, we can prepare ourselves to soothe, distract, or divert until we are ready to do extended aftercare in the form of reflection described above.

*

Learning to be intentional about cultivating pleasure requires time, sometimes years. It requires decolonizing our desires and healing ourselves. It’s also a liberating, joyful experience. Owning our sexuality, learning more about what turns us on, and having fun while having sex is life-giving. We deserve to cultivate and experience pleasure, not just the absence of exploitation and marginalization, but the pursuit and fulfillment of erotic power.

⁹ Davis, Davey. “BDSM and Aftercare: How to Support the Tops and Dops in Your Life. 28 July 2018. <https://www.them.us/story/bdsm-aftercare-tops-doms>

¹⁰ Sprott, RA and Randall A. “Black and Blues: Sub Drop, Top Drop, Event Drop and Scene Drop. *Journal of Positive Sexuality* vol. 2. November 2016.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

TO MAY

LINDA MORRIS

INSTAGRAM — @lindasachiko

TWITTER — @lindasachiko

I knew you first as a healer. Your hands held mystical powers. They could draw out the pain from my mother's swollen ankles and pull the red from my sister's flushed cheeks. When you were around, I feigned headaches and sore shoulders, just to feel the crushed silk of your palms pressed against my neck.

These were the moments when you looked at me and not away. I craved the wholeness of your gaze.

The first time we traveled together, I became sick and spent the day locked in a hotel room, so delirious with a fever that my skin ached. You stayed behind with me, pressed your cool hands onto my hot skin, and shared stories about a past life in a murmur so low that your words merged together into a steady hum. You are my first memory of care.

And still, I always feared you. You came with warnings, slipped to me behind your back in sharp whispers. Every trip to you began with a story about when someone got too close, punctuated with a pact of silence: "Please don't ever ask about Camp."

The slightest reminder of Camp—a bowl of watery soup or the sound of wind whistling through windows—would send you into a body-quaking fit of tears, followed by days of impenetrable silence. Camp was where you spent your 22nd birthday, and then your 23rd and your 24th. Barbed wire fences and armed guards in tall towers. Sleeping in old horse stalls on thin yellow mattresses. Everything covered in dirt. Everything tasting of dirt.

Camp was where you lost your mother. Camp was where you became a wife. Camp was where your life ended, and Camp was where your life

began. Camp held something unspeakable. And so, because we loved you, we didn't speak about Camp.

But Camp had a way of creeping into our lives—in the way your lips curled into angry bows every time you spoke of Grandpa, in the way you refused to speak our language or to eat our food. Camp clung to our clothes, and stuck to our teeth, and quietly shapeshifted into shame so thick that it clutched our throats. Silence about our grief transformed into silence about our joy. I knew just as little about what caused you pain as what brought you pleasure.

I was 19 when I finally gathered the courage to ask you about Camp. You recounted the facts as though reporting the weather—polite but ready to move on, ready to move away. I asked you what it made you feel. Weren't you angry? Are you still angry?

Your answer was simple: *Shikata ga nai*. It can't be helped. What happened was terrible, but there is nothing we can do but move on. There is no point in talking about it.

You left this world a few months later. I found out during my break in the attic of the salon where I worked as a shampoo girl, digging my fingers into the heads of strangers, and patting their ears dry after washing them clean. I sat on the matted brown carpet, crouched over my purse, listening to my mother's shaking voice through my cell phone while the room swirled around me. I considered telling everyone what happened, that I was grieving, that my family was grieving, that I needed to go home. I tried to find the words and realized I had none. I had no language to share loss, and I had no words to describe pain. Instead, I dropped my phone into the pocket of my apron, walked downstairs, and kept cleaning.

WE HAVE NAMES

DANNY RYU

I wish I had a story
of a girl like me
found in an attic, maybe,
or an archive,
or with me in a rocking chair,
legs crossed and small
lending my two ears and one spirit to an elder.

the story, yes, *the* story;
the one that tells me who I am.

I'm listening, I'd say

maybe they'd tell me of the rocks and the water,
our forever ancestors (forevenstors??)
who shapeshifted way before it was cool—

*'we know loss,
we know the giving up,
we know of dying,
of being none,
of letting forth.'*

these pages (fictional, of course)
these words whispered by the elder
would give me some kind of string to hold onto
legs folded, small
a string that tells me—you are not so, totally, alone in this

I wish for this story, I'd tell the elder
the archive
the attic
I wish for it with every part of me—

I've been waiting for the scrap of paper
found between the pages of *Aki and the Fox*,
it reads,

*'you have a name.
we gave it to you.
so you might know loss,*

*know the giving up,
of dying,
of letting forth.*

*where you come from, small one,
death is not an end,
but a holding of each other,
a remembrance that we have not forgotten how to shift shape
you, dear one,
are the rock,
the water.*

*I know you are angry,
and lost,
but we know you,
and we know just how to find you.'*

I wish
I wish
I wish

I wish I could remember my origin story,
and I'm afraid I've forgotten where to find her.



An excerpt from

I'M A PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER AND I SPENT \$500 TO TAKE A BATH AND CRY

SHIVANI DAVE

WEBSITE — www.shivanidave.com
INSTAGRAM — [@_shivani_dave_](https://www.instagram.com/_shivani_dave_)

So, when I arrived at my absurdly luxurious hotel suite to find a broken bathtub, I did cry, but not in the way I had planned.

At the start of this pandemic, I happened to be on the precipice of what felt like, some real fucking growth. After four years of therapy, this butterfly was ready to emerge from her chrysalis.

However, anyone else who's spent four years in therapy knows that healing does not actually look or feel like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. Maybe more like a worm inching its way to the surface during a rainstorm. Rather than drown in your own bullshit, you risk being bludgeoned by life's foot traffic.

I, also, met someone. Who, on our first *real* date (because taking someone home from the club does not count) said *you don't seem like a calm person*. To which I was both insulted and star-struck. Had I finally found someone who saw through my bullshit? Who noticed that under all the High-Functioning Depression was a deeply sad, not-calm person?

You see, before therapy, I was the kind of person who moved into their ex's parent's apartment to sleep in their brother's childhood bunk bed. Yes, my ex was also living there. Yes, we shared a wall. Yes, we were both dating other people. Yes, sometimes we all had breakfast together and yes, the first thing my therapist said to me was "wtf is wrong with you, move out."

No, I didn't.

She also asked me, *Who are you when you're not responding to everyone around you?* To which I had no answer.

Instead, I was quitting my job every year and trying to repair a relationship with my parents that never existed. Hoping that I was the reason they didn't want to be parents, and therefore if I fixed myself, I could also fix us.

In wondering if anyone else was recovering from bad parenting, a fellow Desi-Punks member recently posted a video about children's two essential needs—authenticity and attachment. The soothing voice-over explained that children will forgo authenticity to preserve attachment. And suddenly four years of therapy clicked.

I had no idea who I was.

Que my RomCom soundtrack. I embark on a journey to find myself, build some boundaries and choose torrential downpour over suffocating underground. I stop searching for my self-worth in job descriptions. I move in with my girlfriend, adopt a kitten, 37 house plants, and start feeling my feelings so that they don't run me over when I forget to look both ways.

At the climax of this romcom, I decide I want to celebrate this growth. I want to cry, to sing, to grieve, to dance.

I also decide no one can see. Especially not my angel-of-a-human-who-loved-me-for-me person.

I didn't trust that I could put my incessant need to caretake aside. So used to people not respecting my boundaries, I had a tendency to over-correct and shut everyone out.

So I clipped several coupons and got my Guju ass to the William Vale Hotel in the middle of a pandemic.

"Welcome Shivani" read the TV screens.

"Thank you," I said.

I threw myself onto the King Sized Bed For One and then immediately grabbed my phone to film a video for my friends, MTV cribs style.

After chatting with them about how beautiful it was, how lucky I felt and how these special chocolates would ensure I had both an Excellent and Emotional time, I put my phone aside and took it all in.

I had been planning this all week (and potentially for the last four years). I was ready.

I took out my bathtub accouterment—essential oils, bath bomb, herbs (both kinds), fancy candles. I popped a chocolate in and ordered room service with the remains of my gift card. A glass of white wine, olives, and hummus.

When the buzz felt right, I ran the bathwater, dropped in the bath bomb, and stripped naked to catch some selfies on the balcony in the golden hour. After showing my booty to all of Brooklyn, I lit the candles, invited Kali to join the fun, and settled into the tub. I shut off the water to finally enjoy some peace and quiet and bubbles and crying.

As I sank into the aromatic warmth, I noticed the tub was making that gurgling noise it does when it's draining. No problem, I thought. Sometimes the water level is too high for the manufacturer's recommendation and the robotub does its own thing and drains some water without me asking it too. #Luxury

I'm enjoying the tub, playing with the bubbles. The water is still draining. Breathing in the essential oils, watching the candlelight flicker as the sun sets. Still draining. Chocolates are making magic, I feel good. *Why is this tub still draining? I can't relax when the tub is still draining. Where did the bubbles go? Where did my bath bomb go? Why is the water level so low?*

Sitting in a shallow pool of lukewarm water, I push the lever up to tell the drain NOT to drain, and the sound stops. I let the lever go, and the sound comes back. I push the lever, it stops. I let go, it starts. *Oh my god, this bathtub is broken.*

"Front desk, this is Alex speaking."

"Hi Alex, I'm in 2107, and I'm having trouble with the bathtub. It's draining when it shouldn't be, and I need it to stop draining so I can take a bath and cry."

"I'm so sorry to hear that. I'll send someone up right away."

"So I spoke to my bathtub engineer, and unfortunately he'd have to open up the tub and fix it and we didn't want to be invasive. So..." He trails off in that i'm-sure-you-understand-way expecting me to respond in that oh-my-god-don't-even-worry-about-it-way but instead I say,

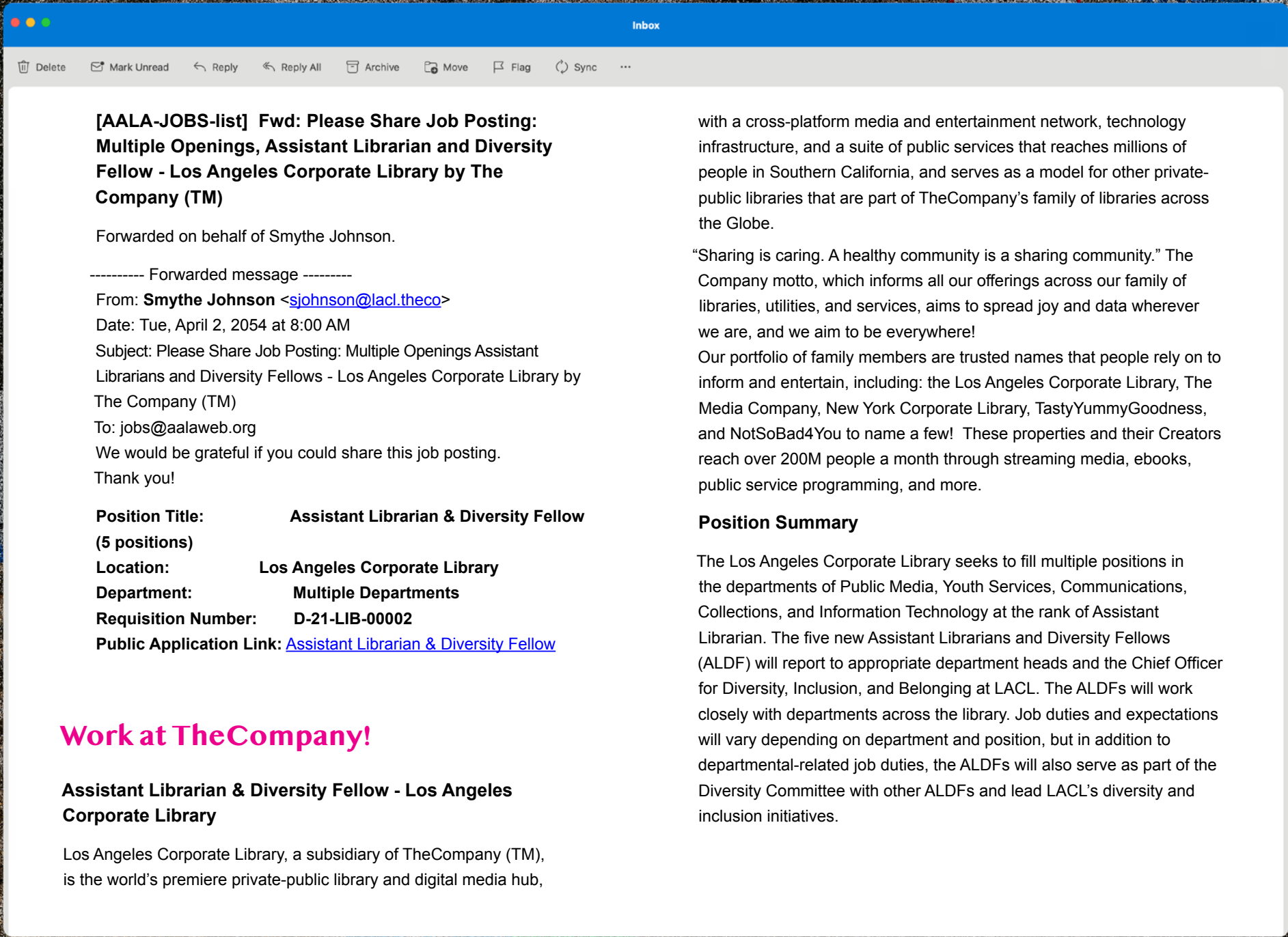
"Oh wow. Oh boy. Oh Alex." I am panicking and buying time to figure out how to pull out my best white woman. I go with "you see, I'm a public school teacher," maybe he's patriotic.

"I paid a lot of money, more than I probably should have, to take a bath and cry. I don't know how you've been feeling during this whole pandemic situation, but I've been having a tough time, and I just really wanted to take a bath and cry. So..." I trail off in that i'm-going-to-need-you-to-treat-me-like-a-white-woman way. He responds,

"Oh I'm so sorry to hear that. Would a \$50 credit to our rooftop bar and lounge help?"

White Woman, Alex, I said, White Woman.

....to be continued



[AALA-JOBS-list] Fwd: Please Share Job Posting: Multiple Openings, Assistant Librarian and Diversity Fellow - Los Angeles Corporate Library by The Company (TM)

Forwarded on behalf of Smythe Johnson.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Smythe Johnson** <sjohnson@lacl.theco>
Date: Tue, April 2, 2054 at 8:00 AM
Subject: Please Share Job Posting: Multiple Openings Assistant Librarians and Diversity Fellows - Los Angeles Corporate Library by The Company (TM)
To: jobs@aalaweb.org
We would be grateful if you could share this job posting.
Thank you!

Position Title: Assistant Librarian & Diversity Fellow
(5 positions)
Location: Los Angeles Corporate Library
Department: Multiple Departments
Requisition Number: D-21-LIB-00002
Public Application Link: [Assistant Librarian & Diversity Fellow](#)

Work at TheCompany!

Assistant Librarian & Diversity Fellow - Los Angeles Corporate Library

Los Angeles Corporate Library, a subsidiary of TheCompany (TM), is the world's premiere private-public library and digital media hub,

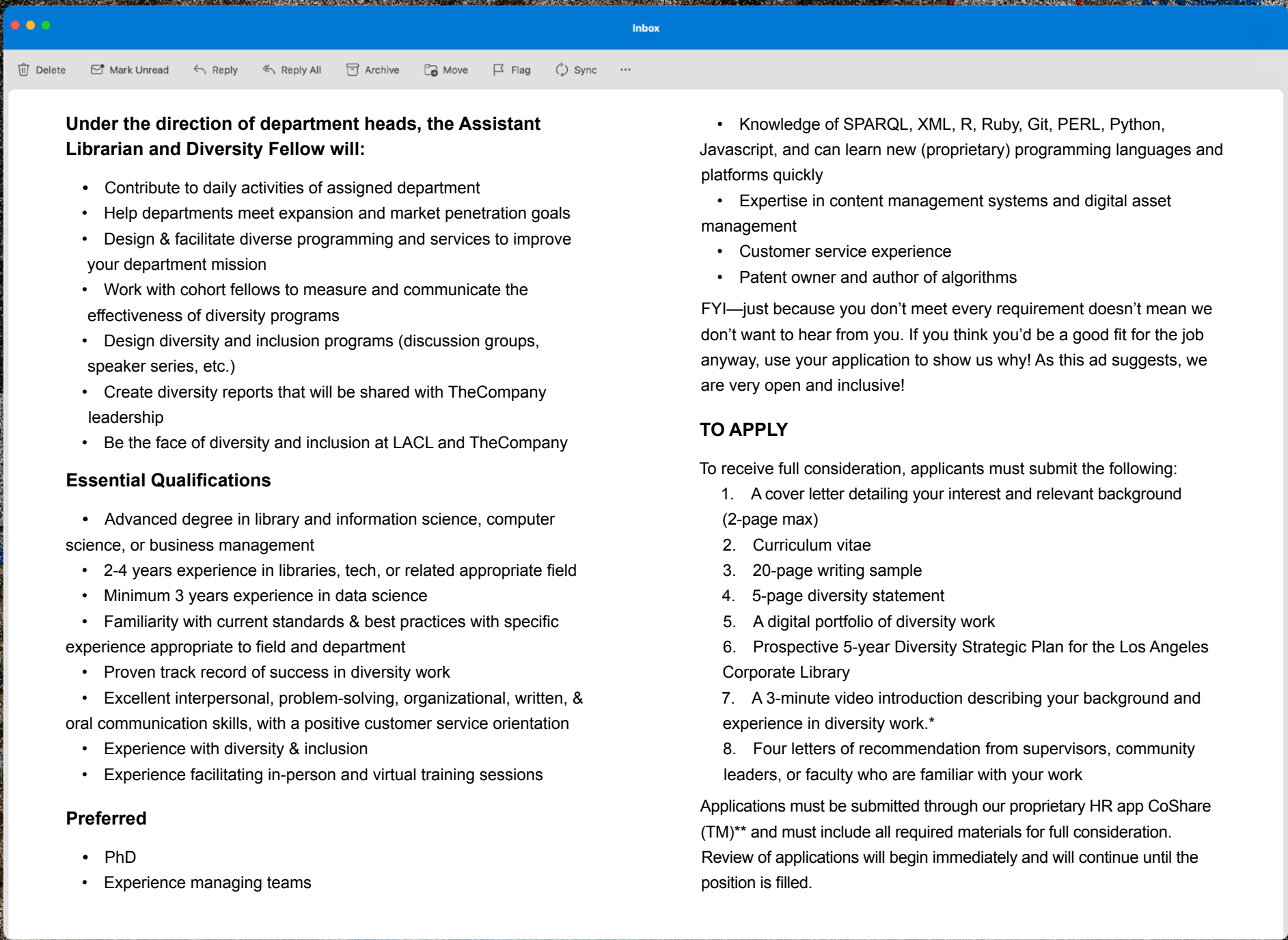
with a cross-platform media and entertainment network, technology infrastructure, and a suite of public services that reaches millions of people in Southern California, and serves as a model for other private-public libraries that are part of TheCompany's family of libraries across the Globe.

"Sharing is caring. A healthy community is a sharing community." The Company motto, which informs all our offerings across our family of libraries, utilities, and services, aims to spread joy and data wherever we are, and we aim to be everywhere!

Our portfolio of family members are trusted names that people rely on to inform and entertain, including: the Los Angeles Corporate Library, The Media Company, New York Corporate Library, TastyYummyGoodness, and NotSoBad4You to name a few! These properties and their Creators reach over 200M people a month through streaming media, ebooks, public service programming, and more.

Position Summary

The Los Angeles Corporate Library seeks to fill multiple positions in the departments of Public Media, Youth Services, Communications, Collections, and Information Technology at the rank of Assistant Librarian. The five new Assistant Librarians and Diversity Fellows (ALDF) will report to appropriate department heads and the Chief Officer for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging at LACL. The ALDFs will work closely with departments across the library. Job duties and expectations will vary depending on department and position, but in addition to departmental-related job duties, the ALDFs will also serve as part of the Diversity Committee with other ALDFs and lead LACL's diversity and inclusion initiatives.



Under the direction of department heads, the Assistant Librarian and Diversity Fellow will:

- Contribute to daily activities of assigned department
- Help departments meet expansion and market penetration goals
- Design & facilitate diverse programming and services to improve your department mission
- Work with cohort fellows to measure and communicate the effectiveness of diversity programs
- Design diversity and inclusion programs (discussion groups, speaker series, etc.)
- Create diversity reports that will be shared with TheCompany leadership
- Be the face of diversity and inclusion at LACL and TheCompany

Essential Qualifications

- Advanced degree in library and information science, computer science, or business management
 - 2-4 years experience in libraries, tech, or related appropriate field
 - Minimum 3 years experience in data science
 - Familiarity with current standards & best practices with specific experience appropriate to field and department
 - Proven track record of success in diversity work
 - Excellent interpersonal, problem-solving, organizational, written, & oral communication skills, with a positive customer service orientation
 - Experience with diversity & inclusion
 - Experience facilitating in-person and virtual training sessions

Preferred

- PhD
- Experience managing teams

- Knowledge of SPARQL, XML, R, Ruby, Git, PERL, Python, Javascript, and can learn new (proprietary) programming languages and platforms quickly
 - Expertise in content management systems and digital asset management
 - Customer service experience
 - Patent owner and author of algorithms

FYI—just because you don't meet every requirement doesn't mean we don't want to hear from you. If you think you'd be a good fit for the job anyway, use your application to show us why! As this ad suggests, we are very open and inclusive!

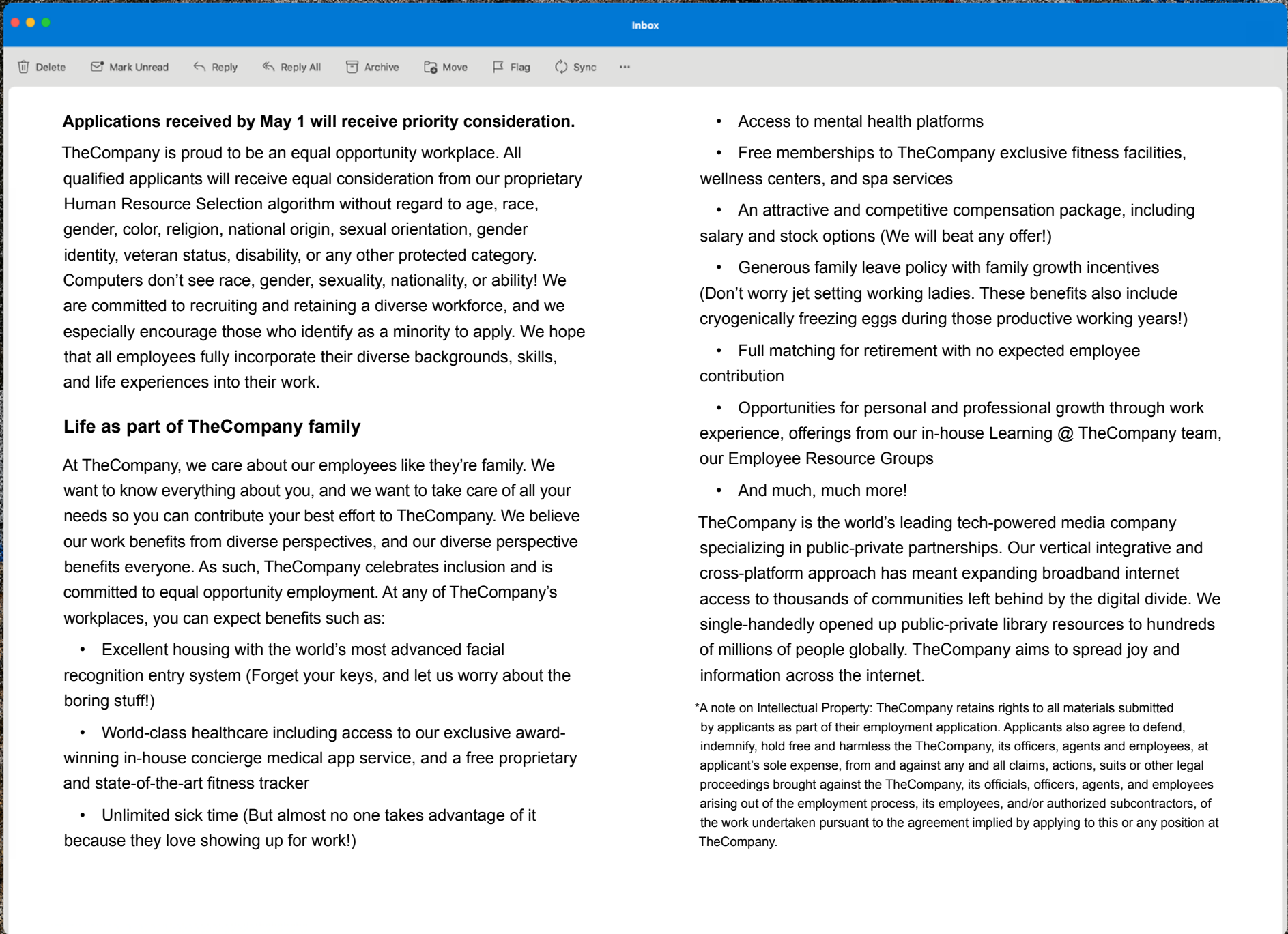
TO APPLY

To receive full consideration, applicants must submit the following:

1. A cover letter detailing your interest and relevant background (2-page max)
2. Curriculum vitae
3. 20-page writing sample
4. 5-page diversity statement
5. A digital portfolio of diversity work
6. Prospective 5-year Diversity Strategic Plan for the Los Angeles Corporate Library
7. A 3-minute video introduction describing your background and experience in diversity work.*
8. Four letters of recommendation from supervisors, community leaders, or faculty who are familiar with your work

Applications must be submitted through our proprietary HR app CoShare (TM)** and must include all required materials for full consideration.

Review of applications will begin immediately and will continue until the position is filled.



Applications received by May 1 will receive priority consideration.

TheCompany is proud to be an equal opportunity workplace. All qualified applicants will receive equal consideration from our proprietary Human Resource Selection algorithm without regard to age, race, gender, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, disability, or any other protected category. Computers don't see race, gender, sexuality, nationality, or ability! We are committed to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce, and we especially encourage those who identify as a minority to apply. We hope that all employees fully incorporate their diverse backgrounds, skills, and life experiences into their work.

Life as part of TheCompany family

At TheCompany, we care about our employees like they're family. We want to know everything about you, and we want to take care of all your needs so you can contribute your best effort to TheCompany. We believe our work benefits from diverse perspectives, and our diverse perspective benefits everyone. As such, TheCompany celebrates inclusion and is committed to equal opportunity employment. At any of TheCompany's workplaces, you can expect benefits such as:

- Excellent housing with the world's most advanced facial recognition entry system (Forget your keys, and let us worry about the boring stuff!)
- World-class healthcare including access to our exclusive award-winning in-house concierge medical app service, and a free proprietary and state-of-the-art fitness tracker
- Unlimited sick time (But almost no one takes advantage of it because they love showing up for work!)

- Access to mental health platforms
- Free memberships to TheCompany exclusive fitness facilities, wellness centers, and spa services
- An attractive and competitive compensation package, including salary and stock options (We will beat any offer!)
- Generous family leave policy with family growth incentives (Don't worry jet setting working ladies. These benefits also include cryogenically freezing eggs during those productive working years!)
- Full matching for retirement with no expected employee contribution
- Opportunities for personal and professional growth through work experience, offerings from our in-house Learning @ TheCompany team, our Employee Resource Groups
- And much, much more!

TheCompany is the world's leading tech-powered media company specializing in public-private partnerships. Our vertical integrative and cross-platform approach has meant expanding broadband internet access to thousands of communities left behind by the digital divide. We single-handedly opened up public-private library resources to hundreds of millions of people globally. TheCompany aims to spread joy and information across the internet.

*A note on Intellectual Property: TheCompany retains rights to all materials submitted by applicants as part of their employment application. Applicants also agree to defend, indemnify, hold free and harmless the TheCompany, its officers, agents and employees, at applicant's sole expense, from and against any and all claims, actions, suits or other legal proceedings brought against the TheCompany, its officials, officers, agents, and employees arising out of the employment process, its employees, and/or authorized subcontractors, of the work undertaken pursuant to the agreement implied by applying to this or any position at TheCompany.

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**Please note: TheCompany's HR application system is currently undergoing a WCAG Accessibility audit and remediation, and may not meet minimum web accessibility guidelines.



Smythe Johnson, MA, PhD, JD
Chief Officer for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging at LACL
Los Angeles Corporate Library
The Company (TM)
Los Angeles, CA

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PRESERVES

AMANDA NAVA

INSTAGRAM — *@books.with.mana*

Her last parent is dead. The ceremony is held at her father's orchard, which had grown peaches for generations. She had barely stayed in touch when she moved out of her little farm town. She got on the freeway and found a new community entirely of her own design. In her new life, there are no more unpaved roads, miller lite parties in someone's renovated trailer, and no more expectations to make babies for a man.

Even so, she goes back to honor her parent's wishes. She buries her life-bringer into the earth without chemicals like in the home country. She buries her last parent deep into the earth under their favorite guava tree. The original seed was taken from the home country and nurtured into a solitary tree behind the family's private residence.

The daughter ends up moving back to the orchard to support the family business out of guilt and a new sense of duty. She reminds herself this is temporary. That she will sublet her city apartment for six months max.

At the end of the season, she picks the swollen, bursting fruit from the tree. She slips the skin of the guava off with the knife brought from the islands. At this point, the fruit can barely hold its shape. She sweetens the tender flesh with honey and adds lemon to preserve. When the mixture touches her lips, images flash.

*

On a lush, tropical island reigned a deity whose skin was kissed by their favorite lover and had hair as expansive and shapely as the sea. The ground would sprout with fruits and flowers when they walked. With a shake of their hair, they could start and stop rainfall.

To call them, their people would pray:

“Deity of water droplets resting on leaves after the rain...”

“Deity of blackened, damp soil...”

“Deity of the soft, milky breath of a baby...”

“Deity of a broken body nourishing a community, that will then nourish us...”

Their people were scattered across islands, canoeing across ocean waters to trade and compete amongst tribes. Alliances constantly changed. Rivals turned comrades and neighbors turned adversaries. This was balance. They slept on the beach, fed by the Earth and Ocean. The only life they knew was full of calluses, cuts, and death before the age of 50. They made nets from the pulp of trees, spent equatorial days with salt caked onto their skin after fishing from dawn until the afternoon, hunted boars for food and protection, climbed coconut trees with a machete between their teeth to get the shelled fruit, and left gifts for the dead who passed through as often as traders. It wasn't an easy life, but it was a beautiful one.

*

In a daze, the daughter recognizes her parent. The person she had thought of as her mother, but who was so much more. This person was beyond human, containing multitudes. A God. No. A Goddess. Also, not quite right. A deity that goes beyond her understanding of the world.

It dawns on her: if her parent was divine, what does that make her? A demi-god?

The sheer ordinariness of her life tells her otherwise. She stresses about tax season, like everyone. She feels lonely and powerless more than anything else. To ease her loneliness and to feel connected to the parent she can no longer call mother, she spreads the guava preserves on a cracker. She swallows.

*

Then, the men came. These men were from a foreign land fueled by perversion. Their energy attracted more of their kind, triggering the arrival of rival occupiers.

The deity wept. They begged the tides to swallow the ships. They tried to push out incoming foreign bodies with angry storms, but nothing worked.

The occupiers foamed at the mouth at the sight of clear skies and waters, unlike their own. The spilled blood poisoned the water and soil.

The poison stifled the deity's strength. They began to taste the torture and hate in the fish and fruit. Their communication with the elements was severed. The wind stopped answering their calls. They couldn't hear the singing flowers, full of pollen. Instead of greeting them, birds disappeared when they walked.

The occupiers with the most toxic weapons won. They kidnapped the deity with the rest of the women. The deity was forced to live an ocean away from their island to the land where the perverse murdered local flora and fauna in the name of aesthetics. The perverse tortured the people whose ancestor's bones made up the trees, grass, mushrooms, and dirt. Then, forced more people to feed the land to strengthen their curse.

The perverse called themselves a nation made of stolen metals and chemical paste that suffocated the earth. This nation continued to poison the deity by forcing them to eat products made in a lab, blasted with cold air, and cooked without heat. This experiment, which the nation passed off as food, caused a chemical reaction in the deity's body. The nation's laughter, mocking, and cruelty grew the more the deity swelled. Along with the swelling, their skin began to crease and fold. This mortal nation blamed them for their appearance, calling the deity unworthy given any opportunity.

The deity began to forget herself. They started to believe the nation's made-up rules, mockeries, and mistook cruelty for heroics. When they gave birth in this nation, their child became afflicted with her life-bringer's amnesia.

*

She watches herself being brought into the world. Her parent thinks about how painfully human their daughter was. She stopped sucking the nectar out of wildflowers and telling their secrets to bugs before the age of six. Instead, she collected shiny metals, paints, and

powders to assert herself as superior. She abandoned her life-bringer, like the nation encouraged, chasing the promise of self-righteousness.

The daughter becomes addicted to her parent's memories. She swears she can hear her life-bringer's voice in her ear whenever she tends the guava tree. In return, she sings to the tree, encouraging its blossoms and roots. Making and sharing preserves becomes her identity.

When she is confident in her guava preserves, the tree asks her to share them. So, she does. She mails them to cousins and neighbors. After propagating her life-bringer's favorite tree, she plants an orchard full of guava trees to cultivate, preserve, and sell at farmer's markets and fairs.

One Sunday, a sharply dressed duo approaches her booth. They look nothing like the people captured in the preserves, but the daughter hopes that they will use their voice in allyship. Instead of buying a jar or two they offer her a factory. They spin tales of mass production, profits (they omit the losses), the power of branding, potential logos, and visions of her jars in Whole Foods across the West Coast.

These dreams of grandeur sped up her heart. Having the preserves whisper into the hearts and minds of an entire coastline could cause millions to confront their dead and their truths. A voice whispers that it's too good to be true. That this is how they trap you. But she hopes for reparations. She hopes that her family history will be more than a single sentence in history books. She hopes—

When they leave, she takes a spoonful of the preserves for guidance. Her eyes settle on the ladybug resting on her bare shoulder, singing with its bell-like voice about drinking from a drop of water resting on a leaf.

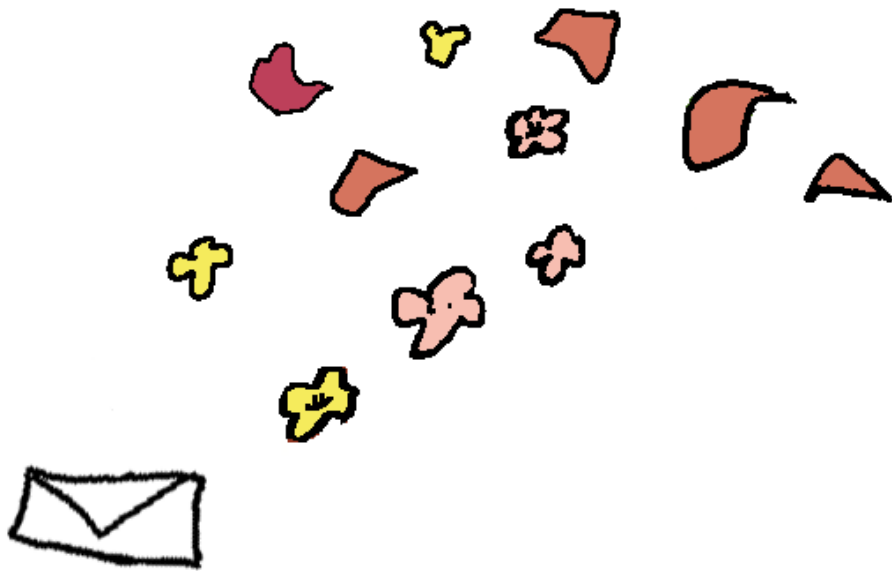
An excerpt from

UNDOC LETTERS

GOEUN PARK

TWITTER — @gashinagoeun

This is an excerpt from a project called Undoc Letters #1-4. The following are Syllabus #1 and Letter #2.



Syllabus #1

Native Land, <https://native-land.ca>

Learning from Cascadia, <https://cascadia.ecotopia.today/#/watershed/acknowledgement>

Nick Estes on Indigenous Technologies, Logic Mag

The New Farmer's Almanac, Vol V from Greenhorns

Any field guide about birds, fish, or trees.

Mapping exercise

Required materials: pencil, paper, time

Map out the following:

the place you currently live in

your neighborhood

the place you grew up (if you no longer live there)

the places your family has lived

Grocery List exercise

Required materials: pencil, paper, time

Make a grocery list. Pick three items from the list.

Where are those items sourced or manufactured?

Why is it on your list?

How did it arrive?

letter #2

April, 2021

Dear undoc friend,

When I was a teenager, my parents worked ten hour shifts at the local turkey hatchery, straining and eventually severing the tendons in their hands as they churned out six dollars an hour. Their nails were perpetually yellow and the bank statements were razor thin. In the latest pandemic year, I made more money from home than my parents did combine for all of my middle school years. I used to feel shame for being poor and now I feel embarrassed for being rich. Or, because wealth and poverty seems to be a subjective matter, “middle-class”—it’s all the same thing to us, isn’t it?

Anyone who reaches and leaps from economic deprivation to excess could tell you about the vertigo and loneliness of making that jump within a lifetime, never mind within a decade. Every day, the possibility gap between my working class parents across the ocean and myself, a tech worker in a rapidly gentrifying city, grows larger. This was, I suppose, part of the plan. Our immigration was not forced, merely financial.

I say that as if capitalism is full of choices. I know it’s not. And yet, 20 years ago, my father used to have a government job in Korea—the kind of gig with reasonable pay raises and guaranteed pension. He cleaned the harbor from his humble boat after a career circumnavigating the world for fish and squid. Our bedtime stories were devoid of pirates and full of currency exchanges and boundary waters. In other words and other worlds, we would have been fine. Even after the IMF crash, the political corruption, the families paralyzed with grief, we would have been fine. Or so I imagine. So much of the immigrant narratives for my folks are like this: opportunistic, fearful, driven by a country split in half by war and capitalist concern. As if being poor in a poor country was the worst fate imaginable.

Do you know this story? It’s the story of the eldest daughter of an immigrant family. She made herself into an efficient and ruthless machine because only she can save the family from death or (even worse) financial ruin. She is a sacrifice made by a desperate family that must make impossible choices. While being an immigrant means tough luck, stacked odds, and joyless years, being an undocumented immigrant means making ugly and shameful choices and not knowing if you’ll survive at the end.

In this story, the eldest daughter of an undocumented family must thrive so the family can survive.

This story carried me for many years. I thought this story would keep me grounded; what I didn’t realize was that I was already treading in high water and to be grounded there, at the intersection of precarity and pressure, would be to drown there. When I stopped believing in the myth of meritocracy, the lies of capitalism, and the urgency of poverty, I realized that I was never meant to be a token of my family’s pride and suffering. You weren’t meant for that either.

I’ve started writing these letters to you because I decided that my parents’ reasons for coming to this country were not good enough for me to justify staying, and I wanted to articulate that to someone who might understand. All my actions and arguments used to be why I couldn’t leave, not why I wanted to stay. The reasons I can offer you now are banal: because my friends happen to be here, because I like the way some mountains here seem to creep closer when you’re not looking, because I am responsible for harvesting a small patch of the neighborhood garden. I wish we didn’t need reasons, though. I wish I had better choices all along. I wish we could choose our lives and loves as foolishly and freely and fiercely as we possibly can. I wish that for us.

Love,

undoc friend

Where does rain come from? Other than the sky? Where does my rain come from?

In the neighborhood of warehouses in the city of new arrivals, his warehouse roll-ups its doors, says, *The rice & spice go here, & the lonely.*

Family tradition: puckering our mouths at widely beloved tastes like rest & pleasure. They fuzzy our tongues.

Displaced people move in the world with the

force of what displaced them.

With the same shape, with

the same style,

the same gait

stompstompstompstomp

People always assume my parents work at a gas station. I get so ashamed—they're literally heart surgeons, says the other private school Desi kid.

Stop it. Stop what you're thinking. I can hear you deciding.

He doesn't work hard

cause he's

Asian or an

immigrant. It's

cause of fear. It's

cause of how badly he needed to leave home in

1979. He arrived but it

takes time to stop the train.

Its mass creaks in my future.

To understand my father, I needed to understand how he sells his labor.

What do you parents do? Are they doctors? asked my White teachers when I read above grade level or earned an A.

Halal cart guys roll through—*Our Jackson Heights boy! He delivers the stock. We cook it, sell it to the eaters. What would we do without him?*

A: I'm trying to write about my father's work.

Umbrella (unfurts):

What are you

shielding yourself from?

His calls to men with many accents.

His many accents to match.

I catch my father in snippets.

I parcel my

knowing in

fragments to avoid

being the angry

person that is behind

the curtain of all these poems.

Broken printer. Stylish leather shoes.

Orders jotted on receipts.

Orders jotted on coffee cups.

Global rivers of goods. My father dips his hand into the spray.

Rivers of goods turn into rains of food in homesick mouths.

Sea in the port stops waving, says, *I carry the boats that carry the containers he orders, that carry the goods from elsewhere,*

that carry the tastes of elsewhere.

How would he describe it?

Driving every street of New York.

The van's vegetal smell.

Okay, he's a middleman,

however fast he

can, taking

goods from

the source to

the market.

Wholesale.

Immigrant you are

no nail with an annular

grip. You slip everyday—

My parents have never not known hard work.

A: I'm trying to write about my father's sky.

My work

(frowning): Have

you considered

looking up?

I refuse to accumulate your evidence.

Go on

you well-dressed beauties.

I'll await you in the evening,

I tell my fears

as they dress & stride

out the door each day.

Displacement makes markets.

Home is always elsewhere.

It can be parceled, shelved,

sold.

I wanted parents

with primary-color

professions. *Your family were*

fishermen. What did they fish?

They're teachers? What subject?

Oh, painters? How lovely to spill

color.

A: Let me write about my father's work.

My fingertips (wiggling): It's

allllll in here baby, you just

gotta let us roam free—

I.

It's easy to feel monstrous.

We've inherited the project of forgetting. Our mothers' silence, our mothers' mothers' silence, builds into backbone of subjugated histories.

The never-said becomes basis for myth. Knowledge, irretrievable, not lost, must then be exhumed.

II.

I have a bad habit of falling asleep with my sun lamp on.

When lights burn all night, I might unlearn the instinct to heed the dark—to heed what lives in the dark. The unknown will bowl me right over because I don't adapt, I autotomize. I cast off, grow something new when under attack, and replace these parts, over, and over, and over again.

This looks like *fresh start*. It looks like *clean slate*.

It's not.

III.

The beauty of community:

Free the mind and body from within the categories of Us and Them.

Ease the harshness of the biopolitical gaze—all the negative chatter of modernity.

The joy:

Celebration, unmeasured against the accoutrements of success.

IV.

As a child, my mother spent some years living on a rice paddy before moving to the suburbs of Tokyo. The villagers, in their attempts to keep the kids safe, told cautionary tales—tragic, unsettling, loving.

As she read picture books aloud, my grandmother would snack on savory bees and locusts fried with rice wine, soy sauce, and sake. A treat. A gift from extended family, packed in the same box as the white peaches, the fresh ears of corn.

It was terrifying and magnificent, the way the crisp insect legs made a dry rustling sound when the bag shook.

V.

I don't wish to cannibalize myself in the race to make a mark before I disappear. Any mark, even a stain or a burn. A notch in the surface of aged, lacquered wood. A scar—an ugly one.

I want to be honest.

I'm afraid that my next step will be my most self-indulgent and least self-aware, that I will be exposed as a fraud, just a child.

VI.

The yamamba, I'm told, is a mountain witch mutated by hunger. Rooted in long winters of famine, the stories say that desperate families took their mothers by the hand, led them into the woods, and left them to die. They did so to the accused, the persecuted, and those with the least to *offer*: the weak, the disabled, the newly born, and the elderly.

The women were the first to go.

The yamamba traps her guests with her unassuming demeanor, sheltering and caring for those in need, as she is expected to. Then, when the sun sets,

she takes her true form. At nightfall, the starving woman kills and eats her guests.

She does so out of necessity, yes, but she consumes human flesh, and *this* is what they say makes the yamamba more than a murderess. Here, woman becomes monster.

VII.

Who taught you that nothing goes to waste?

My paternal grandmother has the strongest teeth, routinely proven by way of her annual batch of homemade peanut brittle. Her voice is loud. Her singing is louder.

She met my grandfather in Birmingham, Alabama; our family is rooted in our fight for freedom and the ache of an excised history that stops precisely where the cargo ships docked.

Grandma shared with me what she once learned: to survive is to chew through bone and gristle, to leave nothing behind.

VIII.

It was snowing when I went on my first date with a girl.

I met her in front of the concert venue on a bitter Friday evening. She was just visiting the city but cut through crowds like a true New Yorker, hand in mine until the last encore. In the taxi that night, our driver pretended not to overhear our conversation—a loose-tongued back-and-forth on queer coding and the last TV show we loved to hate.

She told me that I have a biting sense of humor.

I like this. It sounds like smiling with my teeth.

IX.

I believe, truly, that our experiences materialize in the body.

My breathing, always shallow, rings of my parents' unspoken fears in (of) this country. Every year, pressing the cool stethoscope to my skin, my doctor half-laughs and tells me to *just relax*. My chest tightens at the words; of course it does. My lungs acknowledge the unresolved—every untold,

unanswered presence. Tomorrow, I'll do a little more living and transform again. And again.

It's easy to feel monstrous. More often than not, I don't mind.

Then again, more often than not, I don't speak.

LIFE & PAIN, A COMPILATION

ERME MAULA

INSTAGRAM — @ermemaula

*

The day after Easter is always a triggering anniversary. Years had passed, but it seemed like yesterday that she chose to end her life. She planned for weeks, but it seemed like years had been building up to that day. She had collected all of the pills that had been prescribed to her and researched lethal doses of each medication. She figured that compiling those doses of various pills would do the job. There were loose ends to close, and she took her time doing that—writing in a notebook, showering, putting on a spring dress. She remembers putting all of the pills into a bowl and starting to take them one by one. Half-way through the bowl, she didn't think she could swallow any more. "Why didn't I crush them and put them in a smoothie," she would later ask herself. After finishing all she could, she laid down on her bed knowing the sleeping pills would do their job first. She had lived a good life but was exhausted and done. The one thing that she didn't plan for was waking up the next morning. Death would always be an option for her, and maybe that's why it seemed to be what drew her in and followed her throughout her life.

*

It becomes harder
to determine
where the pain comes from.

Is it on the surface
where it can be squashed out of habit?
Are you in the practice
of being able
to rise above
because it is so familiar?
Are you able to block it out
to the point that you can't even feel
the physical pain?

It gets all jumbled when
we can only feel hurt
and lash out because
we are starting to feel something

To feel or not to feel
is always the question

*

The Port

She absentmindedly reaches to that place on her chest where it still aches. For five years that same spot housed a device that was prodded and poked every three weeks to deliver the poison. Poison that was needed so that she could live while it was tasked with killing. For five years she lived in the unknown. Her past was behind her, but also ever so present. Pain became a constant struggle but was strangely also a comfort. It grounded her and reminded her that she must be alive if she could feel it—to let it go meant that she was dead. Death has always felt just a few steps away.

*

CT Scans

You put on stretchy clothes—nothing with metal so you don't have to undress into
the gowns that expose you and make you cold.
You wait for your name to be called

and then know to recite your full name and birthday. Those are your identifiers.

You are familiar with the long hallways and just the right chair to sit in to watch HGTV.

They call you back to put an IV in—
hoping you get Joe who is an expert with the needles.

And then you wait again until they call
you into the room with the donut.

Again, full name and birthday.

Put your things here.

Lay on the bed there.

Put your arms above your head and pretend that is comfortable.

“Is there any chance you can be pregnant?” they ask before leaving
to watch from behind the glass.

“No,” but what you want to say is “why the fuck are you asking me that? You can see what they did to me and that there is no fucking way I can be pregnant.”

They move you back and forth on that bed from another room.

The sound of the ring moving around and around
in the donut fills your ears.

“Take a deep breath and hold” comes through the speaker

As you feel the bed moving slowly back and forth.

“You can breathe.”

“Take a deep breath and hold.”

“You can breathe.”

Really, you ask yourself? I have to wait for you
to tell me how and when to breathe? But you keep still and do it.

Back and forth.

Back and forth

Take a deep breath and hold.

Until it is done.

and they detach you from the tubes
and lower the bed so you can get up
and go about your day
as if you weren't just fucking a donut.



these are such valuable parts of becoming truly You.

Can I tell you something silly?, I ask Melissa, even though I know she will tell me that nothing is silly, because she is my therapist and her job is to validate my feelings. I carry a screwdriver around in my jacket pocket. It's stubby and has a yellow handle, and sometimes when it has fallen out of my pocket when I am pulling out my fur-lined gloves, I always mock surprise to my friends. Like, what is this screwdriver doing in my pocket? Sometimes they laugh and say, Oh, Brenda the Builder. The joke is less funny after the screwdriver falls out of my pocket a few times.





i try to anchor myself to words, the way i imagine a meditation coach tells you to anchors oneself to the breath, the way a woman anchors herself to a wall in a dark place. i offer emotions, like anxiety, fear, and insecurity, but those are hard sensations to anchor oneself to. in fact, the only stable thing about these emotions are their instability. i imagine earth spinning on the tip of a toothpick, except my mind is the world and the toothpick is sanity.

i am not surprised, then, that i am hyperconscious of all action. i write exhaustively about writing, about the act of it, the mechanisms of it, about how i always write about writing. when i run, i am consumed with thoughts about my legs on the ground, about that split millisecond where both of my feet do not touch the ground, about how i wish my brain could rest and let my body do the work. when i play the piano, i am thinking about how the sustain pedal makes a soft chomping noises, eating and muffling these notes, about how this one note is flat and how my right ring finger is not delicate enough with this melody. with all these thoughts, offering commentary on everything i do, it often feels like my life will collapse in on itself from over-reflection. if not now, then sooner than later. i feel things very deeply, so deeply that i wonder how if it is a sin to coexist with other humans. it is constantly loud.



if, for some reason, the coronavirus destroys life as we know it

and i never get to tell you this in person

or over text, because by then, the carriers will have become defunct (or so i fantasize)

the password to my netflix account

is your name and then mine, as well as the last four digits of my mother's social security number

minus the year of our daughter's birth

never mind that she doesn't exist yet





What is even the point of writing this journal entry? I know what it is. In the past, I would always resort to Flowstate when I know I am spiralling, and if my fingers are focused on doing something, if I am at least drawing the poison out of my mind, however slowly, ineffectively, tangentially, as one prays to a god, then that is better than panicking.



My mother has always told me that I was likeable because of my qizhi, some elusive sum is greater than its part type of energy, found in a smile or a giggle or a golden bracelet that could only be taken off with a tiny screwdriver or my alma mater or the love that my parents have given me. I wonder how much of it is me and how much of it is like a presentation of a case study I've put together over the years, edited for concision.

Princeton has made me overcalculating, and I am not surprised I behave the way I do, seeing life experiences the way I see a job contract or an apartment lease, with expiration dates and KPI reviews. Because of this, I am always on edge, always calculating whether I've done something right or wrong, like whether one way of life, a Sunday off, or the habits I implement to curate my network of friendships are good for this life I'm trying to live. Like the qizhi I cannot tell you what is at the core of this life I am trying to live, just that it is optimized.

The parts I try not to let bleed into my qizhi or my life are things like lying in bed as Vivaldi plays in the background and I want to throw up from the protein bar I've forced myself to eat. Or how I still haven't taken the screwdriver out of my pocket. Or how I cry by the door for no reason other than the fact that my CBD hasn't come in and my anxiety is speaking to me in a language I don't understand.

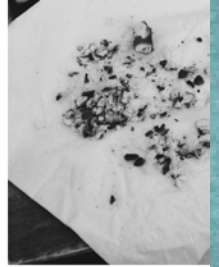




//

it's infinitely bizarre how our heart recognizes patterns in pain.

//



before all the days i spent crying at night and in the morning though, i did spend some time thinking about them—about rosemary, about schuyler, about rowan, about linus. i didn't spend a lot of time fleshing them out, but they felt so real and whole—i almost imagined that if i took a walk down bleecker i would find them in greenwich, at some bar with black and white checkered floors, ordering white negronis for negroni week... fighting over this or that, not knowing that in a few years two of them would fall impossibly in love...

i told _____, different from the woman i had spoken to beijing, that i had wanted to disappear, and she asked me where. i would want to disappear to that universe, picking through the pickled calamari, basking in infinite potential





Growing up was no longer having just one tragedy by which to define one's flawed existence; subsequently, it also meant that it was considerably harder to fix one's existence.

Perhaps this was what growing up was. It was becoming harder and harder to look back at one's life and pinpoint that one thing that had caused her downfall. Her life was no longer defined by a single tragedy. This meant she could no longer fix herself.



I will just
have to trust that we've done our best to love ourselves.



fin



WHERE IT LIVES

ASHNA ALI

INSTAGRAM — @doctordusfitu

For Salonee

When the body feels its twinge, hope
raises its head like a rabbit in a flower patch
soft, wriggle-nosed, and toothy
in my cheekbones. It is neither release
nor expansion, but brightness. A squeeze
of lemon, a crystal caught in a ray of sun.
Fear is a heavier, more familiar beast.
a hardy old dog living out its calloused life,
a copper bowl around my bowels
my chest rendered into burden, burnt field.
It lives too as a slither, furtive and dark.
Its knobs wrench under the arches
of my feet, through shins, calves
—crawls up my neck and holds
my head in its fingers in love
and in threat, reminding me always
to be wary of flower patches.
To stay out of sudden twists of light.

MY BROTHER TELLS ME WHY I LOVE Q-TIPS

ASHNA ALI

I am no tag-a-long kid anymore,
but when my brother pokes his head
in the door he still sees an ostrich
at the bathroom mirror, digging blank-eyed
in its ears as if for gold. I am full grown
when he tells me. Once, as a child,
my ears filled so thick with wax,
it took more than one man to pin me
like a moth to uncork them.
They were there to help,
but all my brother heard
was a trapped thing, thrashing.
I remember none of this.
I just stand on long legs
every morning and clean
and clean until my ears
are caves of dry bone.

EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL, IN ITS TIME

HAIROL MA

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We learned to let go in the kitchen. *Dear Heavenly Father, please soften Ah Liang's heart and give him more compassion. Please let Lili's knee, which she broke during soccer, heal very quickly.* All of us hoped and begged the same things week after week on behalf of the husbands and daughters and sons.

Sometimes we weep while we pray. Always done communally. Afterwards, we wipe the tears off one another with our calloused thumbs and cook. The rice must be rinsed, the *lu rou* must be marinated, the *qing gang cai* must be washed and cut.

Today, I get down on my knees, where I see heaven with more clarity. I pray about the last time I prayed, the last time you were beside me. I sat in the passenger seat while we waited, the noonday sky a violent blue, clots of metal stretched out for miles before us.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

Because of all the traffic that day, we had no choice but to drive straight into the flood. The sea traveled leisurely, slowly engulfing the assembly line of battered cars.

Water pooled around my toes. "This is the wrong way," I said.

"I'm just following the GPS," you replied.

Old receipts, Sunday service pamphlets, disposable chopsticks, and other pieces of forgotten trash floated lazily through the car, sloshing beneath the seats and washing ashore at our ankles. I gathered the ends of my long skirt and squeezed out the salt.

You kept your foot on the brake.

The sun beat down through the roof like warm hail. It was humid, a familiar sweat-choked staleness that preceded every typhoon back home.

A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot.

"The GPS didn't say there would be traffic," you said, staring straight ahead.

"It happens." Outside, a car veered onto a foam-webbed wave, as if gliding, before plunging out of view.

"At least I finally know for sure. No more options. Nothing I can do but wait now." You kept both hands on the steering wheel.

A time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away.

"You know, we still haven't tried Yiping's *zhong yi*. It can't hurt, remember when her husband had a stroke, and he used a mixture of *quan xie*—"

"There's nothing left to do," you snapped. Something in your jaw twitched, then wilted. You dropped your head. "I'm sorry. Maybe you should lower the window, so you can climb out."

A time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build.

"We still have some time." I tried to pry your fingers off the steering wheel, but they were clamped tightly around the worn leather.

So I covered your hand with my palm. Your knuckles hardened beneath my grasp, rigor mortis. I have been carrying your rot for a long time.

"God, you are our refuge and strength," I began.

Soon, the wives and I would no longer carry your diseased body through the flood. You never liked them, crowding your small home, the steadfast women who carefully discarded prayers on a dining room chair or beneath the soap dish in the bathroom, but you loved our cooking and how our kitchen smelled after it had been baptized in *jiang you* and quiet begging. In the end, I sent you off alone.

“Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, and the mountains quake with their surging.”

The current lifted our car, our bodies swaying mutely within.

“Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again. From the depths of earth, you will again bring me up.”

Our hands were slick with sweat, my hand slipping from yours.
“Amen.”

“Amen,” you echoed slowly, the syllables foreign on your lips. Your hand slid out from beneath mine. “You should probably go.”

You rolled down the window, jerking the handle rigidly against the building water pressure. The sea rushed in, the old pamphlets and receipts and wrappers lifted away by the current. Algae crawled in from the open windows. I tried to grab your arm, budge your body, but you kept both hands on the steering wheel as we sank. A chorus of voices floated and churned above me, kind and sad and firm all at once. Below us, a shapeless darkness began where the highway ended in a concrete cliff.

I stroked your pale, pocked cheek, eroded by the salt. Then I undid my seatbelt and turned, feet struggling against the glass.

Outside, the waters were warm and familiar. I saw the shape of my island above me. Buoyed by noiseless surrender, I rose as the current carried me steadily towards the surface.

I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

I know that everything God does will endure forever, nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.

The rice cooker sang. We lifted our heads to the dull yellow kitchen light and rose slowly, rubbing our knees and brushing crumbs off of our skirts. Someone wicked the wetness off my cheek. We tied our aprons and started to wash the vegetables. Their husbands would be home soon.

FLOWERS FOR THE LIVING, FLOWERS FOR THE DEAD

PROMITI ISLAM

INSTAGRAM — @promitii
TWITTER — @promitiofthescas

A poem for Pohela Falgun

A halo of carnations rested on my brow
intimating the arrival of spring.
I went to the university

where our eyes met

wheat paste posters plastered on every surface
and coteries of women, draped in sarees
each distinct, like birds of paradise—

orange bursts of color-soaked joy.

I tasted their giggles in the dusty air, settling into the
back of my throat,

choking in anticipation and

sewn with the language of the
two lovers escaping the cacophonous foorthi

finding solace

in a parched pond at the center of
the concave square, where greenery
had begun to peek through,
thirsting not for water, but

to love.

I inhaled the truth of the moment,

I rejoiced at the dawn of the birthing
season,

an age of saplings taking hold
and woolen sweaters stowed away

but

my foreignness seeped through the clotted whimsy
the space of eternity between home and blood

I found splintered marigolds crusted
in a muddy puddle—

a dismembering
a reflection
a memory

a memorial.

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