

# Trajectory by May-Lan Tan

I don't know how to record things to memory yet, so I make it a dot-to-dot picture to join up and color in later. Later this will play back as if it's the beginning of the memory, but when you slow it down it's just stills, all the sounds and smells bleached out.

I'm standing on a rock in the middle of a hot spring. My parents are boiling eggs in the water with long chopsticks, surrounded by steam puffs like angels in heaven. You can smell the volcano burning underneath.

My sister is at home in Hong Kong cramming for her mock exams. I'm wearing a white sundress with wings, frilly socks, and plimsolls. I don't understand how clothes work or how to control them—for all I know they're parts of my body that change every day by themselves, like meals and weather.

I know what I'm wearing in the memory only because when we come back next year to reverse the trauma, my parents will make me wear the same outfit. Next year i'll be four. The dress will still fit, but they will have to hunt for the same shoes in a bigger size.

The first thing that's really on the tape is pain. My screams make the world red. I'm in the water and then I'm in the air, my father holding me while my mother takes off my shoes. When she pulls off my socks, my skin peels away with them in strips.

I know I have crossed a limit and now I must die. I'm super religious so I am ready to die. I'm going to heaven, I scream. I'm going to see Jesus.

Everything turns white. The ambulance siren tells me I'm me, this pain belongs to only me.

My bedroom window faces a window with a face inside it. it's been there like the moon since my sister left for college and I moved into her room. The face always faces me, but I can't tell where the eyes are looking. Its window is a bathroom window with wavy glass, so all you can see is a chocolate chip cookie, a Lego haircut.

I'm not scared of the face because I might be imagining it, the way my building has its own cat living in the stairwell that no one else can see. I draw pictures and Scotch-tape them to my window, face out.

You can think of the face as a whole head attached by a neck to a body, but after a few days it will turn back into a face. Sometimes the face becomes a man's face. That's when he looks like a guardian angel.

Even on days I'm almost sure he's real, and I close my blinds when I cry or change, I think he exists only in relation to me—that I invented him. When I ask my sister on the phone, she says, Oh that guy. Yeah, he's always been there. She isn't scared of him either.

She comes home for the summer and we go into his building and ride the elevator to his floor. We look at his door.

She says, You know what's weird? All this time I was growing up, and now you're growing up, but he hasn't aged at all.

I tell her I don't know what he looks like. I can't tell which of the people outside he is.

I know which one, she says. He hasn't changed.

After that, whenever I want to make her laugh, all I have to say is, I think I saw Eternal Youth today.

I go to college and come back. On the last day of summer, I notice that I haven't seen him at all.

I call my sister and say, Eternal Youth is missing. Do you think he moved away?

She says she feels like he died. Maybe she's right. I'm surprised. I really thought he was going to live forever.

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You leave the bodies that made you in the city that slayed you. Swallow your tongue, circle twice before landing.

To the beating throat of the shore you come as a spear sweetens its arc for animal arm. Stand cherry-eyed on the rib of a new country eating the host, watching the reefs bleed.

The path that a moving object follows through space as a function of time is guarded by language that supersedes flesh and molecules. An angel of numbness splits the subject into a series of states. The sequence of values can be calculated by ignoring seasons, counting the strokes back to an element of the source. The map of your fractures heals over in gold leaf.

Every day you do fifty pushups, write five pages. Shuck them into the sea like dead brides. Nights you pull a black brake and your dreams torch the walls. Red tape melts in your mouth, streaks the ocean's mirrored stomach.

You live like three bears: a bed, a chair, a bowl, a spoon, a body that's just right—soft, wild, futureless.