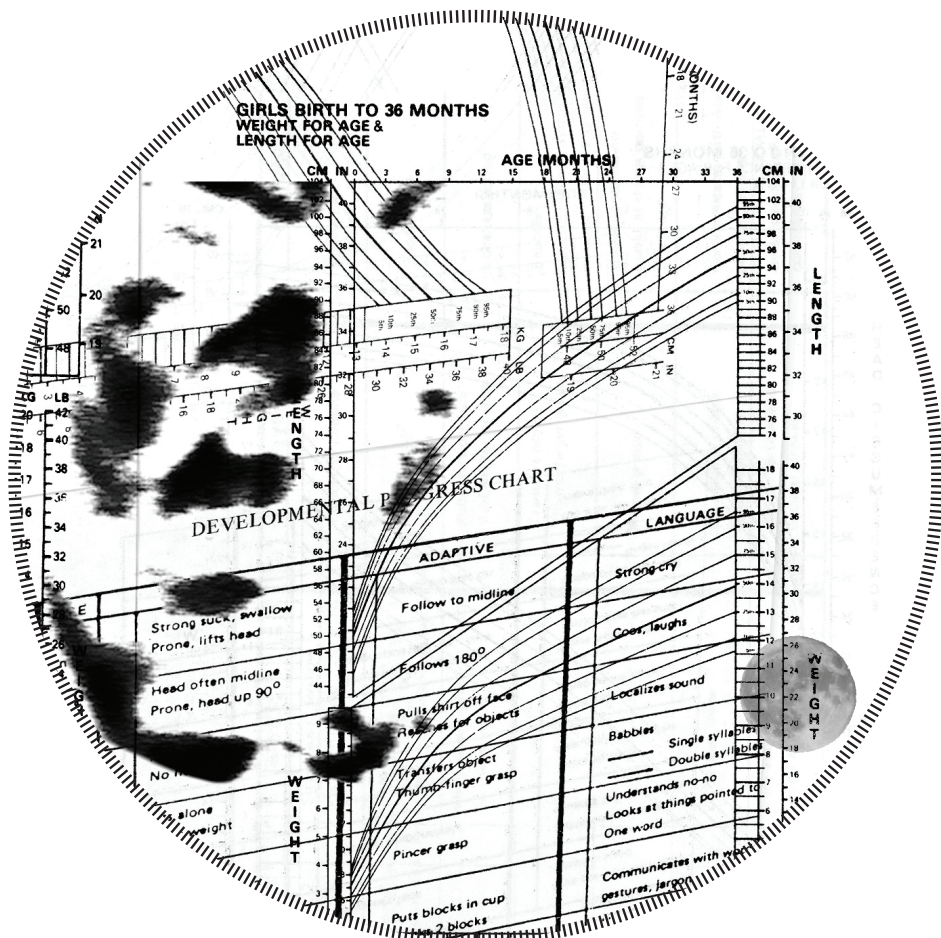


# ANTI



POEMS

JADE YEUNG

*Little girls don't stay little forever. They grow into strong women that return to  
destroy your world.*

—Kyle Stephens

## *Hippocampus Split*

in a ritual of trespasses I had forgotten  
the first trespass before language there's body  
what it remembers when I don't to survive  
there's willed forgetting what cochlea  
keep from brain like secrets  
fingers all they did point claw  
*can I \_\_\_\_? can you \_\_\_\_? why don't you*  
*make any sounds?* brother cop asked  
questions don't mean choices I see now  
pleasure is loud  
in the blood when welcomed  
who was she this trammled baby doll  
its rosebud lips agape salt milk  
its shunted brain wide plastic eyes  
*let's keep this between us*  
he controls what's not

his they say *protect* hide

many narratives

I want

what is mine

once before this body split

we discovered a bird's nest

tucked deep inside we parted

branches he thrust

his hand in

## *Abecedarian Dollhouse*

Anatomy book curiosity Little Sister  
 Browses acetate pages  
 Count to ten years old Mommy face wall  
 Daddy face wall No eyes no eyes  
 Erect doors siblings play No  
 Friends just Big Brother answering *What's sex?*  
*Go away!* first But a man grows inside  
 He points to the book tells Little Sister  
 In words then then then then then then  
 Jams Little Sister with touch He he  
 Knows better A boy grows hot  
 Leaden desire stamps Little Sister the answer  
 More locked doors She's rubbed sucked splitsplit  
 N  
 O  
 Power through school good grades good girl  
 Quiet noquiet quiet  
 Rank rotting siblings Big Brother's  
 Slack zipper  
*The bed where it happened is where they sleep*  
 Under language is this  
 Violation this SA CSA COCSA HSA  
 Words fail like letter of the law made  
 Xanthan spirit it it itit spit it out any term  
 You were somewhere in the world in 2002 at the  
 Zenith of play or terror  
 As well

*In which mom asks me what I need*

*age 4: I attempt to answer in Cantonese*

a3 mal mal ah6 mal

aa4 mal poh3 a3

mal mal poh3 ngo5

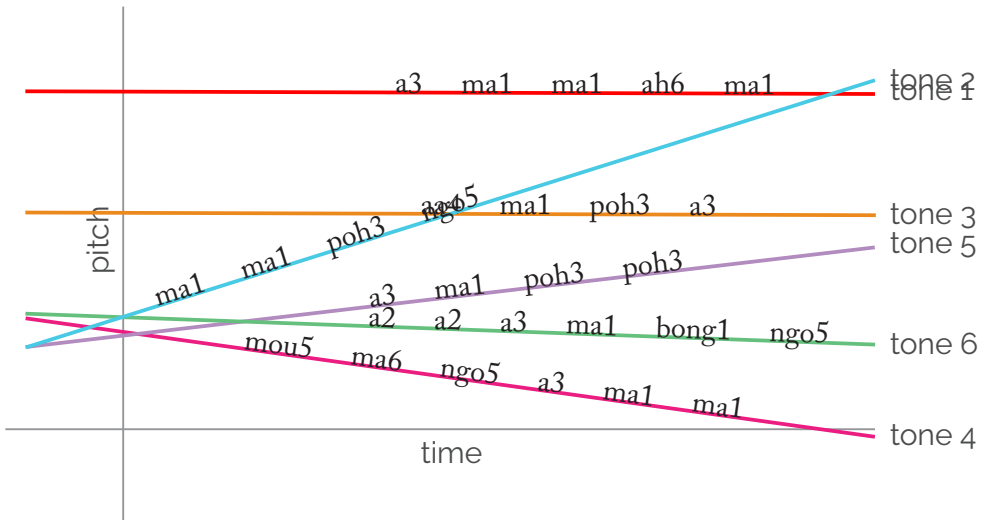
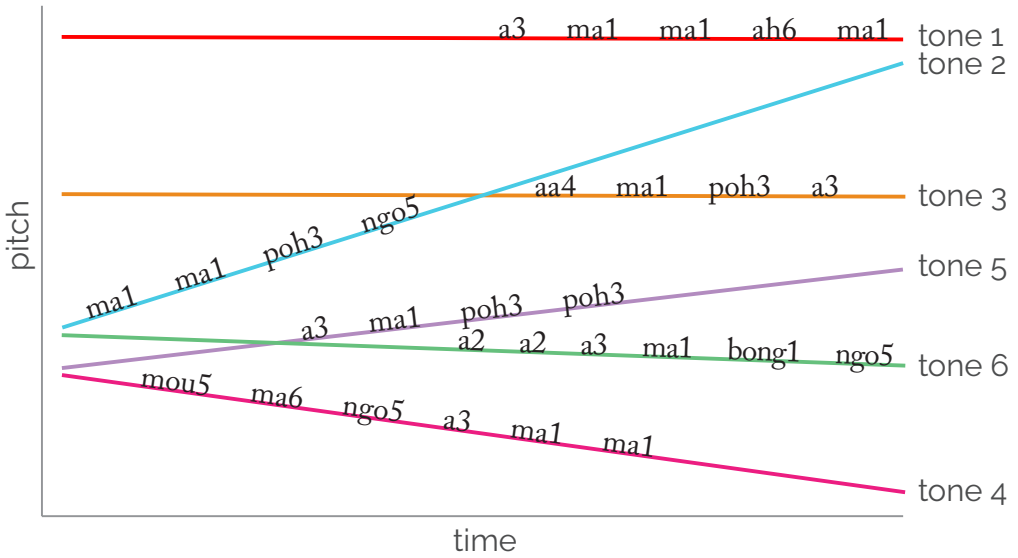
a3 mal poh3 poh3

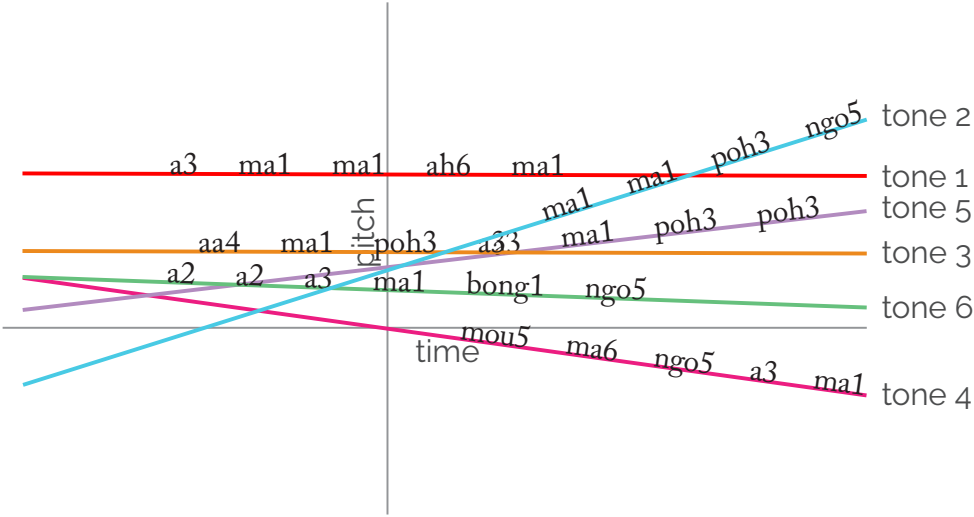
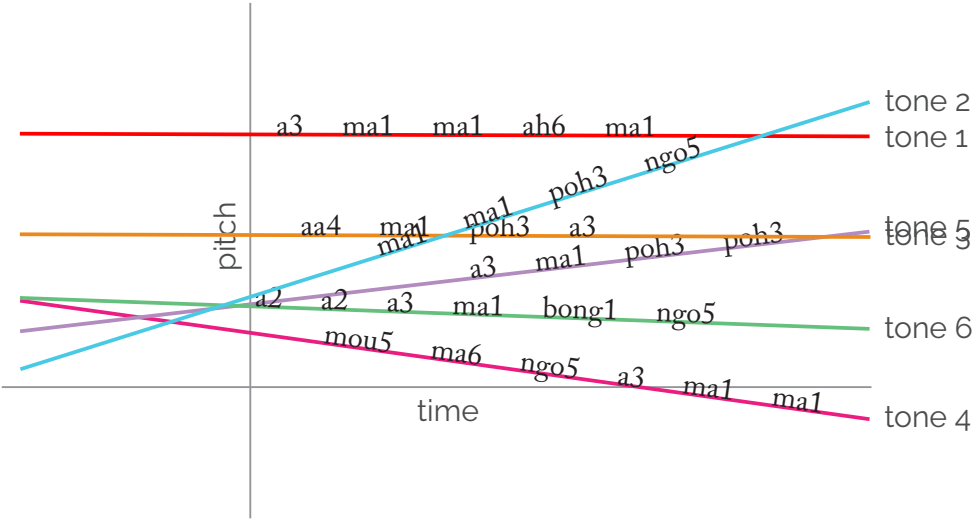
a2 a2 a3 mal bongl ngo5

mou5 ma6 ngo5 a3 mal mal

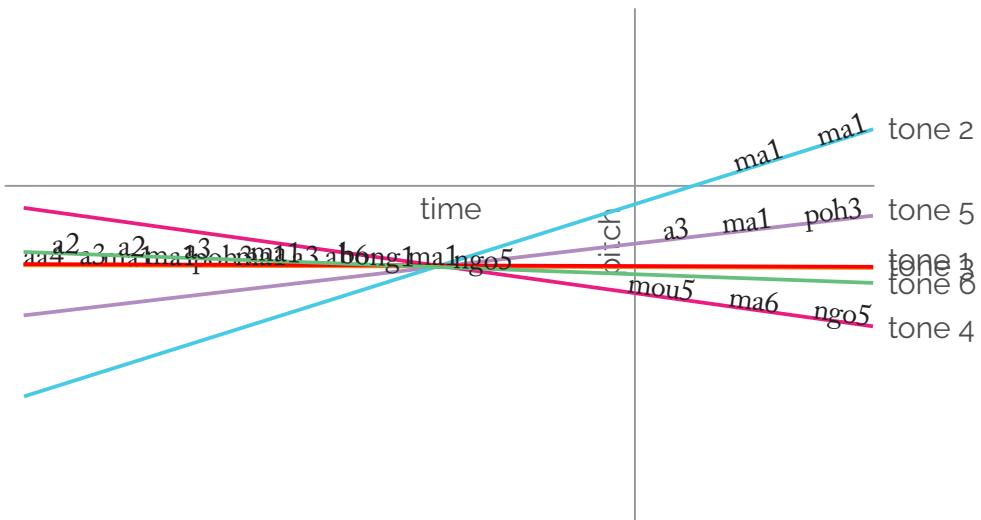
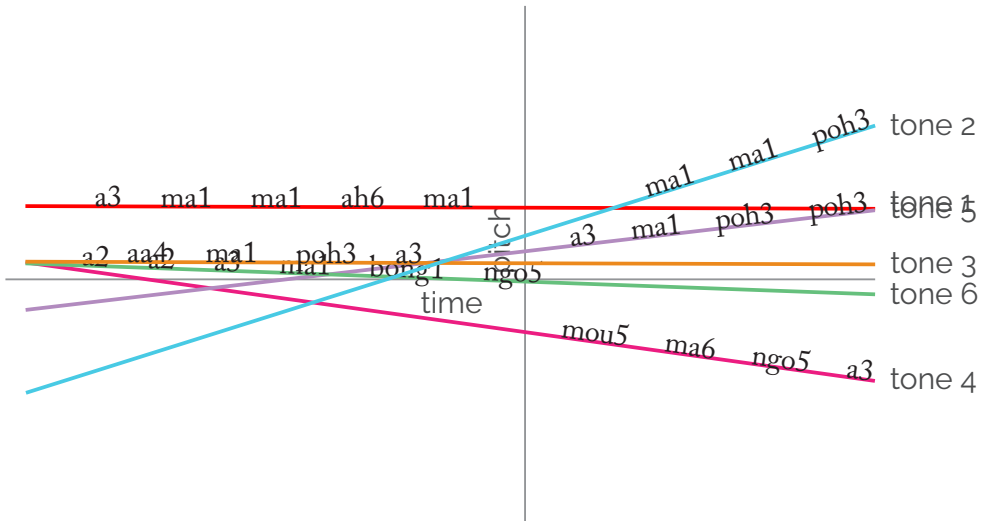
# *In which mom asks me what I need*

*I attempt again*









*In which mom asks me what I need*

if to mother means to measure

I wonder if you sensed scared confused play

brother's in my hands

childhood a tightrope snapped

I climb my way from the valley no one's hands but mine

when you are soft in my memory like a congee spoon

slid on the bowl's edge blown cool

I measure the length of your hair no grays

my brushed ponytail in your hand breasts brief in halfflight

cold cream patted into my face so I could smell like you

no I answer your question with the measure of absence

let the softness out out the throat like vomit on the bed

see it beg: mother me

a compress

mother me cherry cough syrup

mother me a fever

mother mother soup please



embroidered here “luck” \_\_\_\_

2-month-old visit

*Anticipatory guidance : burns (hot liquids) :* \_\_\_\_ 猪脚姜 soup calls for  
pork knuckles black  
vinegar eggs pound of ginger  
repairs what’s torn by me \_\_\_\_

**4-month-old visit**

*Anticipatory guidance : crawling (objects out of reach) :* \_\_\_\_ peeled paint pareidolia  
a boy his empty basket \_\_\_\_

6-month-old visit

*Anticipatory guidance : poisonings :* \_\_\_\_ brother is bitten on the toe  
I find sage green pellets  
clutch them  
like polly pockets \_\_\_\_

**9-month-old visit**

*Anticipatory guidance : restraints :* \_\_\_\_ no one draws back  
a boy’s  
gratification  
*sink “girl”*  
*sink* \_\_\_\_

**12-month-old visit**

*Anticipatory guidance : climbing (falls) :* \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_

15-month-old visit

*Anticipatory guidance : running into danger :* \_\_\_\_ the story goes :  
*I was so scared I lost you*  
*how lucky my friend found*  
*you across the street*

the lullaby goes :

*bright moon shining on the ground*

*little shrimp*

*be good* \_\_\_\_

18-month-old visit

*Anticipatory guidance : water safety :* \_\_\_\_ length-for-age growth charted

what parabola

would I form unharmed? recumbent

curved

like a whale's ventral grooves

excess skin stretched

for feeding \_\_\_\_

## *Of Being a New Yorker*

*a George Oppen remix*

I

I thought I knew hunger

My first boyfriend saves  
Lunch for dinner

A greasy chicken wing in his backpack

High on 53rd  
We watch the East River

I too hate the word *beautiful*  
A city teaches these things

I follow anyone around the city  
No one wants to go home

Tremont, Bronx, I AM

Brooklyn-bound B

There is art even at this hour

I do not disappear  
After four sleeping pills

At the lunch table  
Graffiti blackbooks get traded

We sketch an existence  
Heavyweight, smooth

2

In SoHo someone spray painted

*New York is Dead*

Unnumbered Lenape spirits and descendants  
I do not know you

125th offers sandalwood  
Smoke

I light another one

Another one

Another

3

*At the beginning, the fortunate  
Find everything already here*

Transplants will not stop asking me

“Am I Considered

A New Yorker”

Consider this  
*Get out the way*

*Move B, get out the way*

No one  
Is a native New Yorker

4

To survive you have to look but  
Avoid eye contact

Avoid contact

Check the store window reflection  
Is anyone following you

Someone jogs past me  
I see knives  
There are no knives

Just \$100 leggings

This city of corporations  
Bike-shares, cupcakes

Impenetrable wealth  
Penthouse safety

5

I thought I knew this city  
Who *they* is  
And *us*

I let a man kiss my forehead  
After he finishes collecting change

The drunk at the bodega calls dad  
“Charlie” everyday

Which are *we*



6

We did not disappear

My dad's mother starved to death  
So the story goes

His father "accidentally" shot himself  
So it goes

I would have been sold for parts  
Or was it  
Parts sold

The city called us here to dream

Still, mom fears martial law  
Stocks up on food, water, candles

Wave your tiny American flag  
Kiss your Lady Liberty figurine

7

We all cross a bridge of backs

In neglected zip codes

NYCHA makes accidents

"Hands up to the sky  
We're doing it for Akai"

Pink Houses

White picket fences

In this slave-ship country  
Find no *bright light of shipwreck*

It sails

Exact  
As intended

No one dreams except the dead

8

Still we dance and fuck

Play in abandoned tugboats  
Hospitals, train tunnels

This nation is not *home*

This city is *home*

I am sorry

There is no *us*

## *Warrant*

After news of another “accidental” death  
by the police I tell Marcelo, *Don’t go jogging*  
*not tonight*. As if the daytime were safer

for him or me. We recline into Sunday.  
He shows me a video of a baby orangutan  
named Timpah. A woman teaches the baby

how to use tools to gather water. She tilts  
a halved coconut shell and pours water  
over Timpah’s back. The baby looks like Pongo,

a tiny orange plush Marcelo gifted me.  
He and I play pretend and I hold  
Pongo up to his chest. You see,

Marcelo is neither Timpah  
nor Pongo; Timpah is herself,  
Marcelo is himself, Pongo

is not real. No one, no metaphor, is here  
to teach us a thing.  
And yet there is brief

safety in these embraces: the coo of  
*aw babe*; or Marcelo’s warm, beating chest.  
The video ends.

Witness this: hands perfected  
into tools; all the fatal “mistakes”  
that could have been water,

relinquished and honest.  
Marcelo doesn't fear hands,  
the ones that handcuffed him the first or

second time. Ones that pointed to databases  
as proof of guilt. "He's been arrested before." So  
what officer,

he's been a sequined rock star,  
a starfish rocking on the shores  
of Condado—limbs spread wide to feel

rocky sand against tender belly,  
a friend to the harbor seals,  
a man made beautiful, hemmed and

twirling, he's been a kiss sent to the moon.  
Look officer,  
how small our love is made.

This system of hands  
touches every inch  
of us. We live different lives

together. I try not to weep  
in front of Marcelo. He's learned to hold  
anger in his shoulders. You see,

I bathed him once as he grieved.  
The warm water eased  
nothing. *Don't go.*

We watched everything precious wash away.

## *The Shampoo*

I'm trying to remember if we were happy children. We laughed in the mud, beneath the clothesline. I washed your hair once after I memorized the longest word ever. "S-h-a-m-p-o-o," I spoke into your thick waves. The week's play and debris sucked into the drain. Your eyebrows flecked with suds—your giggle catching up to my giggle.

The kids next door seemed happy, their birthday piñatas beat happy, our hands cupped as they passed happy candy through chain-links.

Before your birth mom came to visit, you hid your bruises and I said nothing of your foster care. Nothing of how an extension cord could double as a jump rope and a switch. I asked nothing of why, nothing of how. I cared—with bubble gum, with dolls, nail polish, witches, earthworms. Our silent sitting. Staring at the ground, the sky.

Maybe we were the same fucked up kids watching the same roaches scatter across our carpets. Sucking our teeth even when someone shut us up. There isn't a memory of childhood not from inside a box, a cut of light where I beg for someone to let me out. Let us out.

Tiana—Tianna—Tiani. I search for you. Try to match your conjured adult face to the profiles. Let me wash your hair again and count your grays against mine. If I find you tell me you made it, anywhere. Tell me you found family, whatever family means to you now. Tell me you saved yourself. Tell me you still laugh so loud that the trees shake. Tell me tell me—tell me you have no end

*I consider blocking mom until the presidential inauguration*

WeChat Message / December 19, 2020 / Brooklyn, NY

# A-neoi a-neoi, I worry about you.<sup>1</sup>

# You need<sup>2</sup> to stock up on food and water. These coming days I'm worried there won't be water or electricity or internet. No wifi. No food.<sup>3</sup> They won't let us leave the house.

Don't worry about me. It's you I'm worried about.<sup>4</sup>

# A-neoi, I'm serious. You need to stock up on food, any food.<sup>5</sup> You haven't seen what I've seen. In the past we had nothing. We had much trouble.<sup>6</sup> As long as a person has food, they can thrive. Do you know what I'm saying?<sup>7</sup> You're still young. I've seen it. I've seen it.

# There'll be shortages.<sup>8</sup> You won't be able to leave the house. They will come to the house. America will have a lot of problems now through January. Do you know what I'm saying, daughter?<sup>9</sup>

WeChat Message / December 21, 2020 / Jersey City, NJ

# Okay, maa. I'm okay.<sup>10</sup>

WeChat Message / January 13, 2021 / Brooklyn, NY

# A-neoi a-neoi, remember to buy more water and candles.<sup>11</sup> I'm scared we won't have electricity. You need to get cash. Cash at home. There won't be internet. The machines won't work. Buy water.

By the gallons.<sup>12</sup>

# These next few days they won't let us go outside.<sup>13</sup> Daughter don't leave the house. I've stocked a lot for us anyway. I was worried you wouldn't know what to buy.

There'll be nothing to eat.<sup>14</sup> Even the trains won't run if there's no electricity.<sup>15</sup>

Okay, goodnigh'

<sup>1</sup>Who'll say the death toll for the Great Famine?  
Maybe 30. 55 million. The body remembers what the archives [ ]

<sup>2</sup>*Long Live the Great Leap Forward ! Everybody, Make Steel !*

<sup>3</sup> 100 million peasants were  
pulled out of agricultural work and placed into steel production.

<sup>4</sup> Things I've purged: siblings,  
masturbation, men—anything that reminds me I have a body.

<sup>5</sup> They said, "Capable  
women can make a meal without food."

<sup>6</sup> "The difficult period," the  
state's euphemism.

<sup>7</sup> Mom uses a word I poorly translate to  
"quotient city" on g\_\_gle. As in, my body needs food so I can see the number of cities  
contained in me.

<sup>8</sup> Example monthly ration: 19 lbs of rice, 3.5 oz of cooking oil,  
and 3.5 oz of meat (maybe).

<sup>9</sup> Reminders of scarcity: ziplock bags, glass jars with  
the labels soaked off.

<sup>10</sup> During the famine a farmer grew cabbages weighing over  
500 lbs each. We make fantasies for each other. We think the future isn't watching.

<sup>11</sup> Black-out of 2003.  
I remember the candles, the family milling around. Some pop-punk album on repeat. He  
didn't touch me that day like he did every other day. He didn't ask me to touch him.

<sup>12</sup> Why does a "better life" always mean running water.

<sup>13</sup> When I realized that playing with  
toys and playing with our bodies was not the same game, it was too late. I didn't want to  
play anymore. I wanted to go home. I was already home.

<sup>14</sup> Things I've purged: fig newtons, doritos, desire.

<sup>15</sup> Most days I cut school and slept in Riverside Park. When I sobered up  
I wandered the seven miles south to Union Square. I found homes to return to.

*After a violent incident at Red Apple Nail Salon a glitch occurs as the Chinese-American Planning Council posts “A Call For Unity And Justice For All Communities Of Color”*

“When our communities are pitted \ against each other, White supremacy is perpetuated. White supremacy is upheld \ when Asian American businesses threaten to call the police on a Black customer, despite the numerous stories of police brutality \ in the news. White supremacy is upheld \ when business owners respond to the service complaints of white or even Asian customers differently than Black customers, who may be met with violence. \ White supremacy is upheld \ when immigrant businesses are vandalized or when New Yorkers threaten to call ICE on immigrant businesses, despite numerous stories of immigration raids and family \ separation. White supremacy is upheld \ when Asian American workers who are sometimes exploited with long days and low pay may unjustly take their frustration out with Black customers. \ White supremacy is upheld when instead of dialogue \, struggle and misunderstanding in communities of color erupt in violence. \ The undersigned organizations call on the Asian American community and Black community to work together to build \ justice for all communities of color and to affirm our role and responsibility in confronting violence \ and anti-Blackness in our communities. As each of us and other leaders in the community release statements about these separate incidents, we call for sustained dialogue across communities of color toward racial justice.”



*You belong here: a zuibitsu*

I thought I invented my dejection  
when looking for my face in others.

@angryasianman tweeted: “Asians, let’s stop going out  
of our way to avoid the other Asian

in the room.” I was dragged to a table  
reading of Shakespeare once. All night

I ate charcuterie and tried to make eye contact  
with the other Asian woman there.

Was she embarrassed of our faces  
or afraid I might steal her White friends?

In a reply to angryasianman someone laughed:  
“I thought I was the only one guilty of this!”

How did we get here?

At a Lunar New Year dinner with Asian colleagues  
we ate family style, the turntable full with lotus root,

congee, water spinach. I wished my friend hadn’t invited  
his White girlfriend. He doted on her

as she ordered all the wrong dishes. She refused  
our new moon bounty.

After a 2020 BLM march Edmond Hong went viral.  
He grabbed a megaphone to admit: “I chose to assimilate

with White people for my own self-  
preservation. I didn’t speak up against racism

'cause I was scared."  
In his newfound awareness

I refuse to wipe the sleep from his eyes.  
"I thought I was White."

Would he call me sister now?

I stepped in to support a Black twitterer  
after he's attacked for "derailing" a thread on White supremacy.

"What about anti-Blackness? I saw how Asians rallied  
behind officer Peter Liang." — "I'm sorry

for how people are responding to you here."  
My apology meant to mend only the moment

when our wound was too large and larger still.  
An adoptee bombarded me with fourteen replies:

"You come into an Asian space to blame all Asians of hating on *Blacks* —  
I asked him to *think* harder — White people built the system. — See you

didn't read—" I wanted to ask. Are you okay. What can I undo  
so you'll hold my moonface

in your hands? At a reading Monica Sok spoke  
my language. *I'm not going to ignore the fact*

*that you're here, you are here*  
*in the room with me.*

I reached into my laptop and hugged her back.

## *healing (n.)*

*with lines from Labi Siffre*

gash in a bluff to make a road // hands submerged in warm laundry //  
 splash of new rain boots / its lemons in the fog // long hot baths / shoulders  
 reposed / returned to me // cool bed sheets / blank ceiling // the new safety  
 of men's voices / slow sudden chanting after a guqin is struck / C major 7  
 piano / *this is my song & no one / can take it away* // bright lobster rolls / rooms  
 by the sea / off-white walls / yearly washed by the bay // cuddles // curries  
 // clove & jasmine incense / smoke // afternoon sun on the armchair / on  
 the underside of a leaf / translucence of kitty ears / tiny veins // lightning  
 cracked black sky / then baby blue // the cardinal at 7 a.m. / *as long as I live /*  
*I will sing*

## *Besitos*

*after "OK CUPID" by Major Jackson*

loving a boriqwa is like loving the island  
    & loving the island is like loving the ocean  
        & loving the ocean is like loving a voyage  
& loving a voyage is like loving colón  
    & loving colón is like loving a tyrant  
        & loving a tyrant is like loving a god  
& loving a god is like loving guabancex  
    & loving guabancex is like loving rain  
        & loving rain is like loving vivir mi vida  
& loving vivir mi vida is like loving jazz  
    & loving jazz is like loving brass  
        & loving brass is like loving an officer  
& loving an officer is like loving a man afraid to cry  
    & loving a man afraid to cry is like loving all our fathers  
        & loving all our fathers is like loving disco  
& loving disco is like loving glitter  
    & loving glitter is like loving laughter  
        & loving laughter is like loving rum  
& loving rum is like loving coco lópez  
    & loving coco lópez is like loving christmas  
        & loving christmas is like loving the three kings  
& loving the three kings is like loving gold  
    & loving gold is like loving the sun  
        & loving the sun is like loving a rooster  
    & loving a rooster is like loving a puerto rican  
        & loving a puerto rican is like loving the return  
& loving the return is like loving the stars  
    & loving the stars is like loving a bioluminescent bay

## *Notes & Acknowledgments*

“Abecedarian Dollhouse” borrows the line “the bed where it happened is where i sleep” from Danez Smith’s poem, “it began right here,” published in *Don’t Call Us Dead*.

“Hippocampus Split” also appears in *Kissing Dynamite*.

“I consider blocking mom until the presidential inauguration” also appears in Indolent Books’s “A River Sings” series.

Gratitude to all the teachers and friends who helped these poems along. Thank you Mya Matteo Alexice, Alan Chazaro, Cathy Park Hong, Rigoberto González, Major Jackson, Naomi Jackson, Patricia Spears Jones, Jasveen Kaur S., Aurora Masum-Javed, Airca Dee Matthews, Tawanda Mulalu, Gregory Pardlo, Brenda Shaughnessy, Angel Sutjipto, Chavonn Williams Shen, Keith S. Wilson. Thank you to all the classmates that held space for these meditations and experiments.

To my first reader, my always, David M. de León. To my sister-survivors—NL, M, AB, DB, CC, LB, PT, CF, and the many more I have yet to meet. Our possibilities are infinite.