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 trammelled  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 it it 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 ma1 ma1 ah6 ma1

aa4 ma1 poh3 a3

ma1 ma1 poh3 ngo5

a3 ma1 poh3 poh3

a2 a2 a3 ma1 bong1 ngo5

mou5 ma6 ngo5 a3 ma1 ma1
In which mom asks me what I need

I attempt again

pitch

mou5     ma6     ma1     ma1
o5     a3     ma1     ma1
a3     ma1     ma1     ah6     ma1
a3     ma1     ma1     poh3     poh3
a2     a2     a3     ma1     bong1     ngo5
aa4     ma1     poh3     a3
ma1     ma1     po     h3     ng
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a3     ma1     ma1     poh3     poh3
a2     a2     a3     ma1     bong1     ngo5
aa4     ma1     poh3     a3
ma1     ma1     po     h3     ng
o5
pitch
time
tone 1

tone 2

tone 3

tone 4

tone 5

tone 6

mou5 ma6 ma1 ma1

a3 ma1 ma1 ah6 ma1

aa4 ma1 poh3 a3 ma1 poh3 poh3

a2 a3 ma1 bong1 ngo5 a3 ma1 ma1

a2 a3 ma1 bong1 ngo5 a3 ma1 ma1

a2 a3 ma1 bong1 ngo5 a3 ma1 ma1

a2 a3 ma1 bong1 ngo5 a3 ma1 ma1

a2 a3 ma1 bong1 ngo5 a3 ma1 ma1
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 halflight

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
The Passport

and there was the revelation, back at home where I found an old “child health passport.” It was a guidebook to postnatal care. The passport was pre-memory. It said, this is the shape of care. Now, godspeed. The dissociation I needed to survive dissolves. I do not return to that house. Not for the new year or the other new year. Mom urged me to visit again.

It was part of a NYC mayoral initiative to reduce infant mortality. It included educational materials mom couldn’t read. I study it: the way it’s saddle-stitched like a zine; the embossed cover like bison leather and the color of the Knicks logo, bright Halloween. The passport meant free preventive care. It meant recordkeeping. It meant *keep baby alive*!

I want to believe I was meant to be born. I was made alive—loved. Mom was stitched up and I was bare, released, ruptured.

In its blank pages I write:

Newborn history: ___ born: out with the living ___
Mother’s gravity*: ___ “a typo of gravidity; loaded swollen sank into “girl” ___ parity

Estimated date of confinement: ___ August in America
not January in China
first brother birthed
in exile we don’t want your mouths
to feed ___

2-week-old visit
Anticipatory guidance: crib safety: ___ my miē dài
is cinnabar is snug
is warm
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

*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

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, 1AM
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
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

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
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

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
*aunty babu,* 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.¹

# You need² 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.³ They won’t let us leave the house.

  Don’t worry about me. It’s you I’m worried about.⁴

# A-neoi, I’m serious. You need to stock up on food, any food.⁵ You haven’t seen what I’ve seen. In the past we had nothing. We had much trouble.⁶ As long as a person has food, they can thrive. Do you know what I’m saying?³⁷ You’re still young. I’ve seen it. I’ve seen it.

# There’ll be shortages.⁸ 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?⁹

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

# Okay, maa. I’m okay.¹⁰

WeChat Message / January 13, 2021 / Brooklyn, NY

# A-neoi a-neoi, remember to buy more water and candles.¹¹ 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.¹²

# These next few days they won’t let us go outside.¹³ 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.¹⁴ Even the trains won’t run if there’s no electricity.¹⁵

  Okay, goodnight’
I consider blocking mom until the presidential inauguration.

# A-neoi a-neoi, I worry about you.

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They won’t let us leave the house. Don’t worry about me. It’s you I’m worried about.

# A-neoi, I’m serious. You need to stock up on food, any food.

You haven’t seen what I’ve seen. In the past we had nothing. We had much trouble.

As long as a person has food, they can thrive. Do you know what I’m saying?

# There’ll be shortages.

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?

Okay, maa. I’m okay.

Okay, goodnight.

Yeung

1 Who’ll say the death toll for the Great Famine? Maybe 30. 55 million. The body remembers what the archives [ ]

2 Long Live the Great Leap Forward! Everybody, Make Steel!

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

4 Things I’ve purged: siblings, masturbation, men—anything that reminds me I have a body.

5 They said, “Capable women can make a meal without food.”

6 “The difficult period,” the state’s euphemism.

7 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.

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

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

10 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.


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.

12 Why does a “better life” always mean running water.

13 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.

14 Things I’ve purged: fig newtons, doritos, desire.

15 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 zuihitsu_

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 boriqua 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, Airea 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.