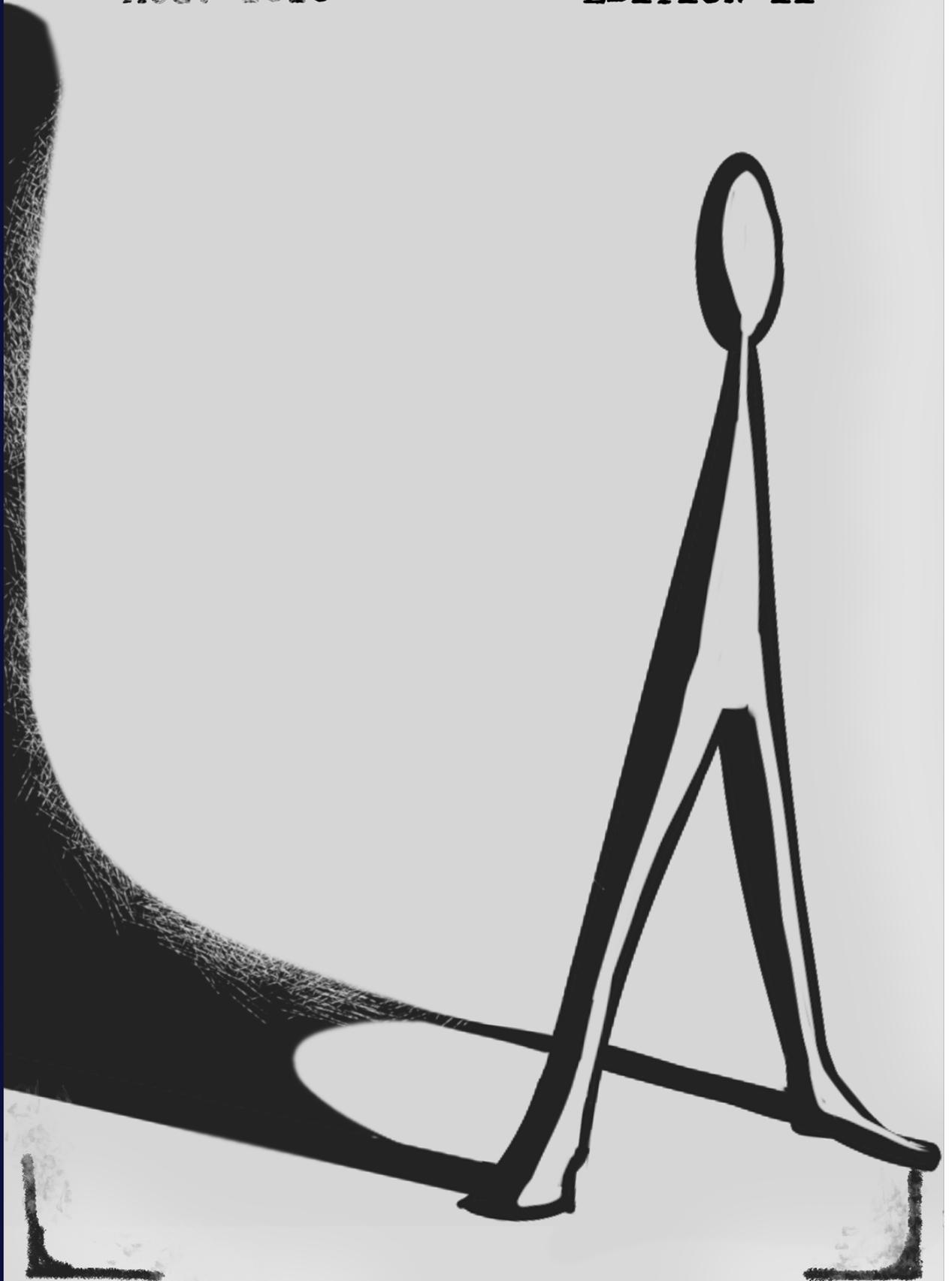


Y A W P

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Mission Statement

Editorial Team

Our Mission. YAWP is a literary journal dedicated to cultivating the manifold voices of a modern generation. In this spirit, we seek to provide an open, free space for the unfettered expression of emerging young writing.

Witness

Grace Song

A block from
the pizza parlor,
three pairs of shoes hang
from the wires, tilting
north, northwest, west,
southwest, and south...
as if the boys
heard us remembering—
and stirred awake.

Red Shoes

Savannah House

Zayra, brother told me, You don't need red shoes
Or white skin
Or periwinkle grins. Daisy is just Daisy
And that isn't a sin,
But she isn't perfect,
As beautiful as you,
Whose green eyes and caramel skin
Match the jungle of our home.

But Brother, I said,
She smells like Champagne's Kiss
And the boys look—ooh
And the girls ahh
And I have periwinkle eyes.

Brother smiled
And Daisy did too,
But she looked too soon.

Dear Boy

Ginger Anderson-Willis

Dear ridiculous boy,
Silly, strange, annoying boy
I don't miss you

I can still remember your hands
Boney and callused
Laced with mine
Ink-covered and soft

I remember your eyes
Green and blue and sparkling
Like the ocean in summer
I remember your smile
I'd look at it like it was the moon

This isn't a love letter
I don't miss you
The memories are a coiled snake in the depths of my belly
The snake ate the butterflies
It's curling around my arteries
Poisoning my veins

You offered me your opinions like crushed strawberries in the palms of your hands
I offered you the sunny me that smiles
The quiet, dream-girl me
Lips sealed
Sewn shut by what I thought was love
Now that you're gone
The stitches are ripped
My tongue is made of knives
I have venom in my blood
You don't scare me now, you silly boy
My poems come in floods

You linger sometimes
I see your hands next to mine on the piano
I see your eyes winking in the stars
I see your smile in the city lights

But I don't miss you
I lost my voice with you
I lost myself
So I'm taking back the little parts
Pieces that are mine
I can dance in the dark now
Without seeing your eyes
It's my voice singing loud now
So stay away, ridiculous boy
My poems are better without you

Action

Aldwin Li

You see them, don't you? They're dressed drab and sound slurred and loud. Screw this. Shit that. Fuck the other thing. A moment ago they were posing for selfies next to a trash can. Beer bottle clatters over shoulder. Someone spits.

You see: look what this country has created! Civilised people – courteous, cultured, civilised people. What people these are. What perfect people.

Something says just go. But you stand to a side and watch, and you see one of them getting to his knees at the turnstile. Is he looking for something? Trying to crawl through? It takes you about ten seconds to realise he isn't. So you look where he's gesturing and you see one of his friends—big-boned in a biker jacket, readying into a run; an athlete at a starting line.

It takes you about twelve seconds more to realise: biker jacket is going to jump on him and over.

Your camera is in your hands before you know it. You stare. Tourists, businessmen, the station guard stare. Disbelieving. Can't blame them: can't blame you. You look at the camera as to confirm reality. This looks half out of a cartoon. And through the lens, recording, blinking, biker jacket runs, runs, runs, slows down – maybe he won't? Maybe he won't do it after all? – then he gets on his friend's back, somewhat gracelessly, and clambers clumsily onto the turnstile, looks hesitant for a second – lifts himself over like a miracle and dumps himself on the other side, and there are cheers and another friend is going through another turnstile and dragging his friend through and the station guard isn't even moving, just sitting there, and roars of laughter and slaps on the back and they go through – gone

and only now does the intercom intone *This is the transport police...*; only now does the station guard, the businessmen, the tourists move; only now, you see, do you hastily slip camera into pocket, like contraband.

You see?

You knew. You all knew. It was wrong. But you didn't stop them. You were all still. Transfixed. Terrified! Too terrified to deter the things you wouldn't dare to dare to do.

Too excited to turn away.

Among the Redwoods

Elizabeth Loea

Muir Woods is supposed to be beautiful this time of year, but I would say it's either beautiful year-round or ugly year-round because it changes so rarely. There's nothing like a forest fire to decimate the trees, but—although I've only lived in San Francisco for a couple of years—I haven't ever seen Muir Woods get hit too badly.

Once last year, the sky was so grey it might as well have been photographed in black and white, except for the sun, which was the terrible rust color of rotting iron. It was as if someone had mixed blood and orange juice and spilled a single drop onto a pencil sketch of the California coastline. Nobody could go outside that day, and after the smoke cleared, I made up my mind to go out to visit Muir Woods and similar forests as often as I might, in large part because I became aware that they won't be the way they are forever.

I take a tour every time I visit even though I know the trails by heart now. The treetops almost blot out the sun, but every so often, there are patches of light that look as if they have been strewn across the dusty trails or splashed across the pine needles. Most of the guests are elderly, and some of them just like to stand in those spots of sun for a few minutes, breathing and remembering.

One such woman once said to me that the sun "warmed her old bones." I know that it's just something old people say to younger people, but something about that struck me—that one day, my bones will be old too, and I may stand still in the sunlight and stare around at the redwoods and feel a sort of kinship because I will be old like them, and we will have both lived longer than our fellows (although their resistance is more literal; they are, relative to other trees, fireproof).

Today, I signed up for a tour with only four people, including myself. Joining a group so small wasn't intentional. This is my day off work, and through a chain of unfortunate coincidences it's a Tuesday, and almost no people my age are off work on Tuesdays, so everybody here is old enough to be retired. Some of them are young, because Muir Woods is close enough to Silicon Valley to draw the young Google hotshots who retired at thirty and have too much money and too much time. It's also close to Marin, which is where the non-Atherton old money folks live, so some of the people here are the kids who are thirty-five with full access to their parents' money and have no other occupation except spending it.

But my tour group is all old people. I like old people, except when I don't.

The woman next to me (who is five-foot-nothing and has baby blue eyes and a swoop of grey hair straight out of a decade when women wore curlers to bed every night) speaks to me instead of the people her age.

“What’s your name, honey?” she asks. She says “honey” as if it’s force of habit—with no real affection—but it warms me nonetheless.

I tell her my name. She smiles, repeats my name, tells me hers. Her name is Rebecca Perez. I call her Mrs. Perez, she asks me to call her Rebecca. She is from St. Louis, but she’s moved around a lot. Oh, I’m from Santa Fe? She met her husband in Santa Fe. It’s beautiful, but it’s awfully hot, isn’t it?

It is awfully hot, I agree. Santa Fe is beautiful and I miss it more than anything, but anyone who’s been there will concede that it’s awfully hot.

The tour guide shows up. He looks oddly familiar, but that might just be because he looks like every tour guide I’ve ever gotten a tour from in NorCal. Sunburnt and skinny, a guy with his unwashed auburn hair in a man-bun. Long cargo shorts, a tank top with the arm holes big enough to show his ribs all the way down. Neat, but too casual—he’s clearly breaking dress code with those toe shoes. He looks like the kind of guy who’d quote a Kardashian and attribute the words to Kant. And then, if you called him out on it, he’d say it was ironic, but it really wouldn’t be.

“Welcome, everybody!” he says. God, he looks familiar. I hate it when people look familiar to me. “Muir Woods, as you know, is named after John Muir. He was born in 1838 and died in 1914, and was one of the greatest naturalists of his day. He was also a philosopher, and—”

I ignore him, as I always ignore tour guides, and watch the world as we make our way through it. It’s always better to be with a group. I can get caught up in the world without getting absorbed in my own thoughts, which are so often turbulent and confusing that I would prefer a moment of quiet to truly appreciate this place whenever I am here. It may be a little counterintuitive that I find true silence only when I am in the company of other people, but it is the *forest* that gives me that peace. The other people merely provide the white noise I need to appreciate my surroundings.

We pause briefly on a bridge and I lean my elbows on the wide, dark wood. Beneath, a creek skids across the rocks, slipping and sliding its way down to what I know will eventually be the ocean. I remember something from years ago, a story from elementary school: Winnie the Pooh and his friends, standing on a bridge, throwing sticks over one side and racing to the other to see which stick came out first. At some point, Eeyore fell in, I think, and got washed downstream, and there was a whole kerfuffle that interrupted the otherwise peaceful afternoon.

Oh. *That’s* where I know the tour guide from. I remember that face, sitting opposite me in the circle as our teacher read us that story. Then the face elongated, the jaw became

square and then round again as middle school hit, as high school caught us all by the hand and yanked us along toward adulthood.

I had never known him well. I think his name was Tom Brearley, and now that I look at his nametag, it *does* say Thomas, which would make sense.

He seemed a little boring to me when we were children, now that I think on it, or perhaps not boring, but non-creative. Not that everyone has to be original, but he was lauded for his creativity in our class, I think, because he could fit every Silicon Valley buzzword into any sentence.

As childhood memories do, the memory of this man hits me hard, not because I know him well or have any connection to him but because he is, in some way, a manifestation of my childhood, my memories of Santa Fe, and he is here in California talking to Mrs. Perez—*Rebecca*, I correct myself—and he does not recognize me at all.

He does come over, though, probably because I'm younger than the others and standing alone and I have a better handle on Yelp and am therefore the most likely to give Muir Woods a bad review with his name in it.

"Hi," he says. He doesn't know my face, even though it has not changed much since high school. Maybe it just *feels* as if my face hasn't changed all that much. Maybe I look completely different.

"Hi," I say. I don't know what else to say. I'm usually a little more charismatic, or at least, I'm usually a little more *coherent*, but this is an exceedingly odd day, and I don't want to talk to him because he reminds me of when I was young, but I can't help talking to him because he reminds me, in an odd, disconcerting way, of home.

"What's your name?" he asks. I tell him. I tell him my full name, in fact, in case it helps him remember.

"Why'd you become a tour guide here?" I ask. It's an innocuous question, but I really want to know. When I was in high school, I did think he was going places for a time, just as everybody else did. It was probably *because* everybody else did, now that I think on it, but the why doesn't really matter. When you're young, you don't have much cause for comparison, so the most ambitious person you know seems like the most ambitious person in the world.

"I moved to California from Santa Fe," he says. The old people wander the clearing, looking at birds, pointing. "I'm a business and marketing guy, really," he adds, as if it's a secret. "I'm just here to pick up some extra cash for a startup I'm working with. Consulting for, actually. Do you work in tech?"

I tell him I don't. He loses interest in me, but I ask him another question, because it feels almost impossible not to. By now, I'm just seeing how long it will take before he recognizes me. I have no investment in him knowing who I am. He was no friend of mine—no enemy either.

"Do you miss Santa Fe?" I ask. "It's beautiful this time of year."

“I guess,” he says. “But I like it better here. There’s money to be made, and the people are interesting.” He doesn’t say *more* interesting, but I take it to mean that.

I suppose that makes me boring. But my mom always said that only boring people think other people are boring. I don’t know if that’s true, but I take comfort in it.

“You seem smart,” I tell him. “And if you’re working for a startup, you must be.” I’m trying to restrain a smile. It feels wrong to mess with him, but I’m angrier than I’d like to admit that he doesn’t know who I am. Am I that invisible? Did I leave that little of an impression on him, on the rest of the people I grew up with? How come I’m the one remembering him, and not the other way around?

“I guess,” he says again. Apathy seems to be part of his brand. He *has* to have a brand if he works in marketing. “But I don’t like to think of myself as smart. I just like to think of myself as having some good ideas and strong work ethic. Really, I’m a creative.”

I hate it when people use creative as a noun, I really do. I say nothing. Why am I so angry? The trees here tower over me, fire resistant. I have nothing against them, but everything against him now. I’d like to push him into the river. That would be silly, but it would be kind of funny to watch him float downstream like Eeyore, getting caught in the eddies on the way.

“This might be too personal,” I start, and he perks up, “but what are you planning next? What direction do you see Silicon Valley shifting in?”

It’s the worst question I’ve ever asked. In college, I majored in a subject that taught you how to ask good questions. I can hear my professor screaming at me now.

“I see it going toward outsourcing,” he said. “We’ve built an infrastructure—” *we?* I think, but don’t say “—and now we can start establishing connections with engineers and developers in Portland, Seattle, Atlanta, Houston, all across the country. They’ll bring new ideas, help us iterate on our model. Mind you, Silicon Valley’s model is almost perfect when it comes to ideation—” I snort, mask it with a cough, consider yet again the possibility of pushing him into the river “—but we need to have a growth mindset about the future...”

I nod along and wonder at how I ever thought this man had anything to say that could teach his classmates anything. He’s a little like an online text generator, receiving basic inputs and spitting out renditions of what he hears with a bunch of fancy words attached. He has grown up, and I have grown up, and the way I think of him—a somewhat-stranger in school, a total stranger now—is not an impression of a razor-sharp business acumen, but an understanding that he is a disappointing entrepreneur trying to make it in a place that eats entrepreneurs for breakfast.

He leaves me alone after that, which might be worse than having to listen to him continue. I actually can’t decide which is worse. On the one hand, I would have to listen to him and be disappointed, both in him and in myself. On the other hand, his wandering off is a confirmation that I made no impression on him when we were younger—that my younger self was, contrary to my belief back then, unremarkable.

I stay behind when the tour heads back toward the gift shop and I watch the redwoods above and around me, the water below me. To them I am unremarkable, too, but one reassuring truth outweighs my uncalled-for anger at Tom Brearley: he is as unremarkable to them as I am.

Everyone is unremarkable to the redwoods.

A December Evening

Pax Logiodice

It's only 5 pm, but it's December, so it's already dark out. You are leaning against an electrical box, waiting for the bus while sucking on a lollipop. It's one of those big lollipops you get at pharmacies, ones so big they hurt your jaw a little when you first start sucking on them, but you've had this one in your mouth for a while so it fits comfortably now. The flavor is so sweet it feels sharp on your tongue. You picture a knife made of sugar crystals, then wish you were an artist so you could draw it. You're listening to music, a singer whose songs make you feel the way you do after a good cry. It's nice to feel that way without actually having to cry beforehand.

A man passes by you. He stops and says something. You pull one earbud out, expecting him to ask you the time, or when the bus is coming. Instead he says, "Hello beautiful."

It is the second time someone has ever called you beautiful in your life. The first time it was a boy you were seeing, and it embarrassed you, but secretly you were quite pleased. This time however it is a stranger, and he is twice your age and twice your size.

You put your earbud back in and avert your eyes. He says something else to you but you don't react. He walks away, muttering to himself, probably along the lines of "bitch" or "whore." He walks into a nearby convenience store. You watch him warily as he goes.

You should have just walked home. It's not that far, you could have. You walked there, after all. But it had gotten much colder since you left your dorm, and you foolishly chose to wear cotton socks. All the same, you should have walked. You think about your mother, and how scared she would be for you if she could see you right now. You think about the self-defense lesson she gave you when you were... how old were you? Nine, ten? As she tucked you in, your bedtime story that night was,

"If a man on the street tries to talk to you, don't talk back. Walk away. If he grabs you, bend back his pinkie. Yell 'This is not my daddy' as loud as you can."

Back then you did not know what an adult man would want with you. Your only idea was monetary gain, that he might be kidnapping you to hold you for ransom.

The man is still in the store, you can see him through the glass. He's talking to the cashier. His body language looks animated. What's the word for when... your heart skips a beat, but it's bad? *Misses. Misses a beat.* Yeah, it does that.

People pass you on the sidewalk, people your age, people who probably go to the same school you do. It's a big school. You debate asking one of them to wait with you. A nice-looking woman passes by, you could ask her. But—no, she's only a little taller than you

are. If he came back, if god forbid he got *violent*, You'd just be putting her in danger too. That's the trouble, you don't know how much danger you're in. And if you overestimate, then you waste everyone's time, then you're overreacting.

Which isn't worse than getting attacked on the street, but still.

The man leaves the store. Your pulse quickens. A pair walk by you, a girl and a boy. They don't look like they're in any hurry. *Perfect.*

"Excuse me," You say, and you're surprised by how small, by how meek your voice sounds. The boy and the girl stop and turn towards you.

"There's a man," You point to him, subtly. "And he kind of said some stuff to me and I'm a little worried he could come back so would you mind waiting with me, just 'til the bus comes?"

"Of course!" Says the girl. "We're waiting for the bus too anyway."

"What did he say?" Asks the boy.

"Oh, he just said, like—hello, beautiful—" At this moment you are acutely aware of how minor this is, on the spectrum of street harassment.

"Oh, I'm about to throw hands," says the girl. Her face wrinkles in a display of fury that tells you she's been in this situation before.

"It looks like he's leaving." Says the boy, and it's true, he is. You watch him closely still, until he rounds a corner and disappears.

The boy and the girl wait for the bus with you. The boy plays a trivia game on his phone, and you help out. You are surprised that he doesn't know the name of the melting clocks painting. It's *The Persistence of Memory*, you tell him. When the bus comes, your lollipop is completely dissolved. You tuck the stick into your pocket, which is what you do with all trash when there's no trash can in sight. You sit, and stare out the fogged, grimy window as the bus brings you home.

Review: Night Market in Technicolor

Editorial Team

In cosmology, *ylem* is the term formerly used by physicist George Gamow to describe a hypothesized original substance at the start of the universe. Now known to be the plasma that formed immediately following the Big Bang, it is essentially the matter out of which all things emerged.

In “Ylem Theory,” the opening poem in Stephanie Chang’s newest chapbook, the word is used in conjunction with a beginning of a far personal, but no less powerful, scale:

... A body that hounds prayer like a housekeeper
with heirlooms. A body where you die
in every iteration of sick, wake only to count fewer
and fewer bones. To live and tell the tale
when the world’s already in love with shinier things—
You and I both know it’s what I do best.

Looked at a certain way, these final few lines are a thesis statement, or perhaps an explanation. Chang has prayed for salvation; she has seen her own end at the hands of a tragedy that, as she remarks lines earlier, has been authored by no one but herself. Yet she has lived to “tell the tale.” To write poetry about her tribulations may be useless to a world that is “in love with shinier things” than the musings of a 17-year-old, but it is what Chang does best, and it is what she sets out to do in this collection.

Through a cast of characters from Chinese mythology, and sometimes history, Chang weaves a story at once about heritage, femininity, and the role that poetry plays in her life. These characters emerge and re-emerge; sometimes they interact with Chang in these poems, sometimes Chang slips within them. Meng Po, the goddess of forgetfulness, is the first among these figures to greet the reader, constructing a new body for a narrator that desperately wishes to forget her old one:

I have broken the same body so many
lives over, touched myself a legacy

of scar tissue & lightning.

What is it that Chang wants to forget about herself? Perhaps the question is not what she *wants* to forget, but what she has already forgotten. “By now, my reflection has migrated anywhere but home,” she says. So what is home, to her? The answer is partly revealed at the very end:

I have the Cantonese for flower

but not arrangement—though that
can be arranged in the next life,

says Meng Po, my heart already
breaking in its new body.

As the Canadian child of Chinese immigrants, Chang feels herself cut off from her family’s past. This is a disconnect evident in language—she has the “Cantonese for flower but not arrangement.” To obtain a new body, then, is to become fully Chinese again.

But is there another reason here? Throughout the poems in this book, Chang also explores her femininity; her greatest ally in this task is the moon goddess Chang’e, whom she finds connection with beyond just name:

...I am tired of loving men

while the herring of my heart migrates to sea. A sunk cost.
Come autumn, fireworks cry shrapnel, and I hate rabbits and men.

The “I” here is twofold: Chang tells her story through that of Chang’e. In the latter’s flight to freedom from her husband’s abode, the former expresses her own longing for independence—she is tired of “loving men” who try to entrap her while her “heart migrates to sea.” Perhaps Meng Po can grant her this freedom too, in the next life.

The ideas that are first introduced in these poems—“Ylem Theory,” “Haunt,” “Ghazal for Moon Maiden”—are returned to again and again throughout *Night Market*. As Chang reflects on her cultural homelessness in “Haunt,” she fumbles for its label in “Reflections in a T&T Supermarket”:

...and there is a word for this. There is a word for homesick
when you’re already halfway there.

And several poems earlier, she melds her two struggles in the life of Anna May Wong, the revolutionary Chinese-American movie star who resisted the stereotypical roles common for Asian actresses of the time period:

Tonight, the men are hungry.
.....
I forget the name of the news anchor.
I imagine his face lit on the streets

of a red-light district.

“Hungry”; “red-light district”—in accepting the traditional roles available to her, Wong feels herself more a sex worker than an actress. She is giving up her body to the “masses,” dancing for the enjoyment of these “hungry” white men. In context, the metaphor is obvious. Chang is as much an actor as Wong, in her own way. She is Chinese, after all, and female—a pair of labels coming with their own rigid stereotypes.

Amidst Chang’s exploration of identity is a quiet confidence in her own power as a poet. This is a power expressed first through distinctive style. Chang writes boldly, constantly redefining vocabulary in terms of connotation, rather than denotation. This is a choice evident in the first few stanzas of the book’s namesake, “Night Market in Technicolor”:

Or a bullet in the anglerfish’s mouth.
I pyrite. I silver-tongued.

I gut fish where the spear pierced first.
When I tire of smoke & little animals

you buy me a river & undress lanterns,
search the water’s underbelly

for a stone with an ugly face.

Following this chain of imagery is like playing a game of *shiritori*. From the anglerfish with its deceptive lure, we proceed to fool’s gold. From gold, we find silver—tongued. The anglerfish has a bullet in its mouth; this is like piercing fish with spears. Fish are little animals; when Chang grows tired of fish, the nameless figure she addresses buys her a river and undresses lanterns—why lanterns? Because she has grown tired of smoke also.

Wordplay in Chang's poetry is less a question of connection than category. Both anglerfish and pyrite are known for their falseness; in the same way, gold and silver are both metals. This allows for an incredible diversity in imagery, while also providing an insight into the mind of the poet. In making these connections for ourselves, we are allowed to think in the way Chang thinks.

This confidence is revealed in other ways as well. All the way back in "Ylem Theory," the reader gets a glimpse of why it is that Chang compiles these poems: she has undergone hardship, and in surviving it, she finds herself needing to write. Completing the bookend is "Unsent Letter to Tulip Manor," whose few final lines reveal further *Night Market's* purpose:

...Here, the brightest
place I can apologize. I won't keep you

long, I just wanted to know you.

Who is the "you" that Chang addresses? Her use of the second person is not limited to this poem alone—it appears in other places as well, including "Ylem Theory." That this "you" seems to know details no one else but Chang can know, such as the very fact that poetry is "what I do best," suggests that it is herself to which she is speaking. Or at least, a version of herself.

Which version? There are two that are addressed in these pages; the one that Chang belittles for not speaking Cantonese and the one that is created by Meng Po, in "Haunt." The need to apologize suggests it is the former, so by process of elimination it is Chang's ideal self who is speaking to her imperfect self. But this doesn't seem quite right. Especially given the last line of the poem—surely Chang, having emerged victorious from her trials (as declared in "Ylem Theory"), would know her past self? The final piece to this puzzle is really found a few lines earlier, when Chang plaintively reflects on

How I revised the definition of lonely

just by looking at you. You were saying
all these terrible things.

This apology, then, seems for a different purpose. Chang is not apologizing because she has torn down an imperfect version of herself—rather, she *is* that imperfect version, and it is her ideal self who has said "all these terrible things." Instead, Chang is apologizing for hoping to *become* her ideal self—for having "a body that hounds prayer like a housekeeper with heirlooms," to return to "Ylem Theory."

The last line of “Tulip Manor” suggests a learned lesson, and indicates *Night Market in Technicolor* as a medium by which Chang can “know” herself. Here, we finally learn the power of poetry, for Chang: it is through her poems that she can fully accept her flaws, and reject prayer for a perfect self.