

Julie Chou

## Drowning afloat

i wake  
and find my body chained up  
in drenched jeans and blouse.  
some gooey leaves cling to my limbs.  
they must have been mighty.  
air, weightlessness, surges through me.  
i cast down my eyes & see  
the puddles in the asphalt road  
housing not a pitch-black canopy  
but bands of pink and purple.  
the distant hills, small as my knuckles,  
hold the baby cloud, an infant embedded  
in golden frames, or long, narrow scars  
smeared with iodine. i can't tell if  
the darkened swirl of egg yolk behind  
is still gleaming. i could only sense  
the softness in my arms, and the moth-breath  
that would burst out crying any second, though  
it doesn't feel like consternation any longer.  
it's only a demonstration of re-existence.  
it's gonna believe, disbelieve, and repeat  
like it did last time. but this round i heal its  
wounds properly, patting it through the  
polychrome and the pitch-black in the puddle til  
the yolk is poked, flowing through the streets  
& mountains & buildings & trees, gurgling  
imperceptibly. i look into the burning  
puddle, a grand golden sea closing its eyes.

a stillbirth drowned within, an aborted plan indeed.  
yet scabs are soon ready. as it enters into sleep,  
the sea lifts its lids, and i could see in the reflection  
me as it be. a golden, newborn baby.

**To my elder brother who's sitting right next to me**

I smell the burning from the kitchen  
Fuming in the air. I see a sparrow  
Landing on the pots for a split  
Second. I hear the cars  
Honking and sliding down  
The street. I feel the stiff new  
Leather wrapping the couch

All the while  
I fail to detect your smell,  
To hear the sound of your breath,  
To examine your newly grown stubble,  
To feel your angular hand bone.  
There is everything  
Because there aren't you.

You  
Eluded me,  
Once, twice, thrice.  
But I remember how  
You wedged yourself into  
The gap between the branch  
Roads and the lonely trips that  
You and I trudged along respectively.

Though those footprints were washed away  
Alongside the unglued cartoon stickers  
We once attached to the drawers:  
Sorry  
If I forgot to expect you  
To be another  
Gap.

Yet from the other side of it,  
I collect a short note inside a drift bottle:  
"Where is she", read I.

You might be deaf to this but:  
I love you  
From the other side of the gap.  
I do, I do, I do—

### **For the very first time**

For the very first time,  
I climbed onto the window  
ledge to take a look at a rainbow.  
When I made out the seven colors  
I called mommy immediately,  
and I even called daddy.  
They left two “Congratulations” for me.  
I was six by then.  
The rainbow stayed for a long while.  
I was drowned in delight.

For the very first time,  
I got a stiff neck.  
Mommy took my pillow  
to fend off a blow  
from daddy. And next day’s scraping therapy  
penetrated my neck,  
my shoulder, and then my back.  
I was eight by then.  
Scarlet spots swirled to the surface of my skin.  
I didn’t find it relaxing.

For the very first time,  
My Capri length, white pants were bloodied.  
Mother made a fuss about  
My dumpy body  
that would soon be a patch of land where  
two mounds covered by training bras balloon up  
with sanitary napkins controlling monthly flood.  
I was ten by then.  
I was busy dueling the cramps.  
I didn’t give her a damn.

For the very first time,  
I shoved away a pimpled boy  
and declared to my friends:  
“just broke up with a fuckboy, no biggie.”  
Later the day I was left alone,

so I snuck to the bathroom  
to let loose a few moans.  
I was fourteen by then.  
I didn't mean to cry  
but I figured my lips were so stained.

For the very first time,  
I locked the door when my bastard  
father was downstairs buying his beers.  
The blood vessels once shaped in reckless sex:  
I cut them one by one. Soon the pounding sound  
on the door panel punctured my eardrums.  
I sat stock-still but my hands were shaking.  
I was seventeen by then  
I was through.  
I felt like seventy.

For the very last time,  
I beg you to pluck an ivy branch  
at the end of the rainbow  
for me.

**hey handsome,**

just got off the sports field?  
how was the game?  
i'm dense about the shot the guard the forward  
but i'm sure you stunned the girls on the bleacher again.

the takeaway you treat me to yesterday after  
physics exam was delicious, even more so when  
we did it in the underground corners you  
discovered on this stifling campus. for once  
i became a complacent fugitive:  
the rare adventure for a straight-a.

last time i broke down in front of you you  
made a rebuttal on each one of  
my problems. emoji: crying mirth&wry smile. what else  
can I say? you said if i don't buy your  
arguments you'd swallow my pains like tiny  
capsules. you're a genius debater.  
i feel like i attend debate  
competitions to no avail.

i booked morning call service from you, my  
valet. a new day's hullabaloo seems soft and  
light as a feather, when you linger on the  
calls for a little more while, just to listen to  
a buffoon's morning gibberish.

you're girls' public assets (my asset)  
you should know that. that's why it's unfair that  
the slutty gal ogling at you could  
occupy you. sure she plays minecraft better, has  
time to hang out on the streets with you all  
day long, kisses you more times than  
the number of your footsteps, and bothers to  
leave love letters in your backpack—  
she's less of a writer than me.  
i've got an A plus on literature.  
i'm gonna be an english major.

and i still cannot believe that's  
how i became the taster  
for the plays and poems you strained  
your barren mind to write  
for her.

i think i just wanna unload myself  
the way people do at spas.  
you're my spa. i'd perch on your laps and lean  
against your solid chest, press the stop button  
so my wings suspend the tedious fluttering—  
i'd be enormous. and i'd listen to how you  
lost your video game replying to  
my messages, how you got into trouble with  
the teacher (he's a nasty piece of work) helping out  
your buddy, how your artistic dreams were repressed  
into a series of narcissistic acts by  
paternalism (paternalism sucks at hell), and how  
you confine the duration of that  
sadness to only two minutes. my eyes  
half-closed, my chortle unstoppable. a cynical zoe  
streaks in a carefree zelda's world. The  
paradise of a footless bird  
that doesn't wanna die flying  
is a blurry notion that  
resolves into a vivid mirage.  
it pops up in the daytime  
and follows me into sleep.

it's a fantasy.

it's only mine.