Seo-Young Chu
주 서영

A REFUGE FOR JAE-IN DOE

and Other Fugues

p.

A REFUGE FOR JAE-IN DOE AND OTHER FUGUES

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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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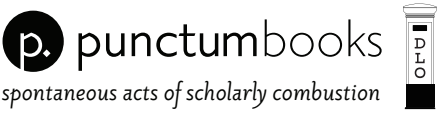
The BABEL Working Group is a collective and desiring-assemblage of scholar–vagabonds with no leaders or followers, no top and no bottom, and only a middle. BABEL roams and stalks the ruins of the post-historical university as a multiplicity, a pack, looking for other roaming packs with which to cohabit and build temporary shelters for intellectual vagabonds. BABEL is an experiment in ephemerality. Find us if you can.

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Imperfect Table of Contents

1. Openings 15
2. Imperfect Concordance: A Poem 19
3. Possible Answer Key to This Book (skip this section if you would rather solve the book yourself) 33
4. Pop Quiz: At what point does *Dictee* (1982) by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha begin? 39
5. Translator of Soliloquies: A Fugue in the Key of Dissociation 43
6. Interlude: Verblessness 73
7. Interlude: Generation Hwabyung Telepathy 75
8. Free Indirect Suicide: An Unfinished Fugue in H Minor 77
9. Interlude: Emergency Response (2018 Hospitalization) 109
10. Interlude: M'어머니 113
11. A Refuge for Jae-in Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major 117
12. Interlude: Transcranial Iambic Submission 151
13. I, Discomfort Woman: A Fugue in F Minor 155
14. Interlude: The 38th Parallel of Living in Ceasefire in the Year 2016 169
15. Interlude: Excerpts from an Email from My Father 171
16. Interlude: Postmemory Alt Text / Fugue in Dream Minor 175
17. Interlude: Homework for Dr. R 179
18. IMF: A Fugue 183
19. Interlude: Two Koreas in the Key of Emily Dickinson 193
20. Science-Fictional North Korea: A Defective Fugue 195

21. Interlude: Trip 207
22. Dream Life of Waste: Fugues in the Key of Capitalism 211
23. Interlude: The Mist Carriage: An Error (2020) 229
24. Interlude: Welcome to the Vegas Pyongyang 237
25. Imagining an Asian American ~~Superhero~~ of North Korean Origin: Fantasias and Fugues in the Key of Hope 241
26. Epilogue: Miscellaneous Discussion Questions and Exam Prompts 261
27. Appendix 1: After "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe": A Social Media Chronology 271
28. Appendix 2: "Dear Stanford: You must reckon with your history of sexual violence" 295
29. Endnotes 301
30. Acknowledgments 313
31. Pop Quiz: At What Point Does This Book End? 317

dedicated to all survivors

For an English professor, she is very poorly able to articulate the "why now" for her suicidal gesture. […] More surprising is her inability to give a linear history given that she is an English professor. She starts talking about her parents' parents when asked about why she is in the ER today.

—From "Mental Status Exam Psych Resident MD Initial Evaluation Note," August 2016
(Patient: Seo-Young Chu)

Openings

You open the book. You open *this* book. Let the book open. Opening, the book opens like an eye. The book opens like a flower. The book opens like a hand. The book opens like a door. The book opens like a mind. The book opens like an invocation to the muse. Now the book opens in a multiverse. Shimmering, glittering, the book teems with many different possible openings. Think of each opening as a version of the others. Now the book opens in the second-person plural. Now the book opens in the first-person minor. Now the book opens in the broken Korean singular. Now, unexpectedly, the book opens with a password once forgotten. We noticed a new sign-in to the book. If this was you, are you lost? To open this book, see the other side for instructions. If this was you, do you consent? Put the pieces of the puzzle into meaningful dialogue with one another. What belongs where? Do you belong here? Instructions for assembly: The book opens with anaphora. The book opens like a scheme of repetition. The book opens, or does not open, the way history rhymes. The book does not open the way history rhymes. The book opens, the book opens, the book opens. The book opens with a content warning. Whatever you do, try not to swallow the book whole. Content warning: sexual violence, suicide, racism, misogyny, abuse, institutional betrayal, wrenching silence.

Now the book opens in 1950 with the outbreak of the Korean War. Now the book opens in the year of my birth: 1978. Now the book opens in 2016 with a psychiatrist writing "She starts talking about her parents' parents when asked about why she is in the ER today." Now the book opens in 2017 with me typing "#MeToo" for the first time. Now the book opens with me as a toddler babbling in my cradle language: Korean. Broken, the book opens with my father being orphaned by the Korean War. History does not rhyme, not exactly, not always. The book opens brokenly. Store this broken book in a dark place far far far away from sunlight. Now the book opens as if it's a mouth about to say something. Englishly the book opens. Now the book opens in the early 1980s with my American schoolteacher telling my Korean parents to communicate with me in "English only." In "English only" the book opens. Now the book is losing its voice. By "voice" I mean "Korean." By "Korean" I mean "self." Suddenly the book opens with me opening Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* for the first time in the early 2000s. And the book is speechlessly in awe. And the book has no words. The book opens wordlessly. Now the book opens with my parents fighting in Korean. Tomorrow the book opens with my psyche fighting with itself in Korean. Yesterday the book opens with a childhood memory from the 1980s: my aunt's suicide in Korean. Koreanly the book opens. The book opens in Korean — a language my sibling and I do not understand; a weapon my sibling and I do not know how to wield. In 1999 the book opens with my first suicide attempt at Yale. I cannot stop thinking about my aunt. The book opens with a spell. "Speak through me," I said. "Tell me the story." Under a spell, the book opens. The book opens with a dream in which my mother and I can communicate fluently in the same language. Spell: Open, book. Now the book opens with a half-open book: me. Or else the book opens with the death of Jennie in 2000 and her rebirth as Seo-Young in 2001. Where did I go when I died? Where does anyone go? The book opens in the first-person plural. The book does not open in the first-person singular. The book opens and closes

and opens again. Now the book opens in the year known as the long 2016. Now the book opens in 1995 with my fall from Catholicism. Now the book opens with the division of the Korean Peninsula as World War Two is ending in 1945. Now, now, now. Maybe the book opens by replacing "now" with "here." Time, after all, is just another kind of space. Maybe the book opens, here, with a plot twist. In a near future where the Korean DMZ has become a sentient dragon-shaped creature — twisting, sinuous, 248 kilometers long — here is where the book opens. Or maybe the book opens with an image description of my twisted, non-Euclidean face. Plot twist: I do not exist in person. Maybe for some reason the book opens with you reading these words. Who or what is writing them? Maybe the book opens with an epitaph. Here out of nowhere the book opens with an unspeakable plot hole: ~~my rape by a Stanford professor in the year 2000~~. Our parents refuse to talk about it. Now the book opens with a prayer for Jae-in Doe. Epitaph: Please keep me/us/her safe. The book wakes up again and opens its eyes. Opening its eyes, the book looks at you from behind its myriad "I"s. The book opens discordantly. The book opens with a discordant concordance. The book opens by measuring the literal dimensions of my figurative self. How large is inner space? Now from outer space the book opens by revealing that I am not a human being but rather a personification of the 38th parallel that encircles the Earth. In multiple time zones the book opens. Here the book opens at midnight. Elsewhere, on the other side of the planet, the book opens at noon. Or is it the other way around? Everywhere and forever the book opens in a time zone called PTSD. The book opens with Jennie and Seo-Young meeting each other for the first time. The book opens with one of us asking: Who am I, and who are you? Now without warning the book opens in a library in Stanford, California. The library is named after my rapist. He used his antique rare books as weapons of molestation. I — we — I hate those books. Now it is summer 2021 and Stanford University, instead of responding to my requests for restorative dialogue, has just made the library named after my rapist disappear. The library "no longer exists." In another timeline,

not the one that we inhabit, the book opens with Seo-Young and Jennie setting fire to the library named after the man who raped me. By "me" I mean "Jae-in Doe." Together we watch his library burn until the last page has turned to smoky ash. Here and there and now and forever the book opens like a wormhole, or a chasm, or a mirror, and the mirror is shaped like a blade. Hold it carefully. Here and there and now and forever the book opens with a mirror, and the mirror is the glassy surface of a calm body of water. What do you see? Break the mirror into as many different broken voices as possible. The book opens with a list of possible titles including "Quantum Memoir," "A Memoir from the Near Future," "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Korean American Survivor," "Multiversal Memoir," "We the Discomfort Women," "Nth Person," "I Am A Cognitively Estranging Referent: A Sequel to *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?*", "Autobiography Made Out of Plot Holes," "Jogakbo Fugues," "Chogakbo Fugues," "Fugues and Fantasias," "Fugues Fugues Fugues Fugues Fugues," "The Untranslated Daughter," "A Design-Fictional Memoir," "Soliloquy of a System," "Autobiography of a DMZ," "DMZ-American Fugues," "Story of Ourself," "I, Jae-in Doe," "Collected Essays, Poems, Dreams," "Fugues in the Key of Model Minorities," "Fugues in the Key of Minor Differences," "Untitled." Let the book open, I said. Let the book open. However you happen or wish to open it, the book opens. Open the book. In the end, the opening is utterly utterly utterly up to you.

Imperfect Concordance: A Poem

Translate this concordance into Korean, using alphabetical order in 한글.

4 (the death number)
38th parallel
248 kilometers (see also: Demilitarized Zone)
1910–1945 (the period of Japanese colonial rule in Korea)
1941 (the year my father was born)
1945 (the year Korea was divided at the 38th parallel by Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel)
1950–1953 (see also: the Korean War, which is technically still ongoing)
1952 (the year my mother was born)
1953 (the year my father's sister—my aunt—went permanently missing in North Korea where she had been living before the division)
1978 (the year I was born)
1990 (the year I started writing poetry about North Korea)
1999 (the year I first tried to die by suicide at Yale and was diagnosed with bipolar depression and anxiety)

2000 (the year I was raped by my Stanford professor)
2001 (the year I stopped going by the name "Jennie" and started going by the name "Seo-Young")
2007 (the year my rapist died; the year I earned a PhD from Harvard University)
2009 (the year I started teaching at Queens College, CUNY)
2011 (the year metaphors dreamt of literal sleep)
2016 (see also: hospitalization, ~~president~~, rape, violence)
2017 (see also: #MeToo, catharsis, feminism, Jae-in Doe)
2018 (see also: hospitalization, ~~president~~, rape, violence)
2021 (the year ~~the Fliegelman Library at Stanford University~~ ceased to exist)
2024 (see also: 2016)
____ (the year I will die)
Square root of negative Korea (= *an imaginary Korea*)

A
A minus
Abecedarian (see also: grades, order, this entire poem)
Academia
Accents
Agoraphobia (see: leash)
Alien (see also: daughter, mistranslation, Mom, science fiction, self, xenophobia)
Alphabets
America, early
America, late-stage
Amnok/Yalu River
Anti-Asian violence (see also: 1945, Asian fetish, fungibility, Korean War, Stanford, Young Choo)
Apology
Armistice
Artifacts, humanoid
Asian American
Asian fetish

"Association copies" (see: America, capitalism, dissociation, ownership, property, rape, Stanford, touch)
Asteroids
Asynchrony (as mode of existence; see: mutant clocks)
Aunts (see also: ghosts, Korea, missing, Mom, mother, North Korea, suicide)
Aura, mechanically reproduced (see: robots)
Aura, migraine

"Barbarities of the Enemy"
Benson, Olivia
Bipolar
Black holes (see: dissociation)
Blazon (see also: corpse, CV, humanoid artifact, model minority, object, rape culture, sonnet)
Blood
Bonesteel, Charles (see also: 1945, Dean Rusk, DMZ, Korea, war)
Books (as childhood refuge from 엄마's fury)
Books, rare (as weapons of molestation at Stanford University; see also: association copies)
Borders (see also: agoraphobia, Demilitarized Zone, labyrinths, model minotaur, North Korea, walls)
Box, shadow (see also: collage)
Brain (as battlefield, as black hole, as garden, as graveyard, as inner space, as outer space, as refuge, as zone of time)
Brother (see: love)
Butler, Octavia

Caldera (see also: 백두산, brain, volcano)
Calling
Canon, Western
Capitalism (as safe word, as war)
Catharsis (see also: fire)
Catholicism (see also: fear, God, guilt, pain, prayer, shame)
Ceasefire, ceasefire, ceasefire, ceasefire
Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung

Childhood (see also: complex trauma)
Chogakbo (as the key to understanding the design of this book; see also: 조각보, cloth, collage, colors, folk art, fugues, gender, Jogakbo, Korean, leftover scraps, patchwork, quilt, stitches, thread, zigzag)
Choice, multiple
Choo, Young (see: Young Choo)
Chromosome
Cloud (see: Ku-Reum/구름)
"Comfort" (see: discomfort women)
Complex trauma (see also: abuse, academia, catharsis, Catholicism, childhood, denial, education, foreshortened future, hospitalizations, miseducation, punishment, rape, sexual harassment, silence, Stanford, stigma, stress)
Confucianism (see: Dad)
Consent (sign here if you agree: X_____)
Contusion (see also: blood, cloud, nebula, pain, skin)
Coroner (see also: blazon, *SVU*)
Corpse, exquisite
Counterpoint (see also: cloth, fabric, fugues, polyphony, quilt, stitches, voices)
Country code +82
Coverup (see: Stanford)
CV (as "course of life," as "Creature, Victor's," as instrument of violence, as Latin)

Dad (see also: 아빠, Confucianism, debt, education, family, IMF, Korea, love, math, model minority, orphan, refugee, robot, war)
Daughter (as typo; see also: alien, Asian American, childhood, complex trauma, debt, fawn, Jennie, love, model minotaur, revenant, translation)
Death
Debt, emotional
Debt, financial
Debt, unforgiven

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)
Dickinson, Emily
Dictee
Discomfort women, we the
Dissociation (……)
Dissonances
Distances
DMZ-American (as an aesthetic category, as a kind of identity)
DNA
Doe (as female deer, as family name for "Jane Doe" and other survivors)
Doe, Jae-in (as a kind of self, as a doppelgänger, as a corpse, as a discomfort woman, as a Korean American "Jane Doe," as a site of other-than-first-person sentience, as a survivor, as a victim, as Ku-Reum's other, as a xenomorph; see also: 도재인, I)
"Douglass $150,000"
Dreams, my God—so vivid and detailed (see also: home)
Dualisms, transcended

Education (see also: _____, books, _____ _____, debt, English, gratitude, _____, _____, misreading, model minotaur, "_____," _____, strikethrough, _____, _____)
Elegy (see hwabyung)
Ellipses
Empathy test (see also: humanoid artifact, identification, identity, K-Pathy, polyptoton, robot, uncanny valley)
English(es)
"English only!"
Eyes (see also: alt text, asymmetry, blazon, eyelids, fetish, image description, Korea, makeup, Mom, myopia, vision loss, Young Choo)

F minor (see: Stanford)
F minus (see: F minor)
Family (see: han)

Fawn: as trauma response (see also: fight, flight, freeze); as baby deer (see also: Doe)
Feminism
Fight
Fire (see also: ceasefire, hwabyung)
~~Fliegelman, Jay~~
Flight
Flowers (see also: Demilitarized Zone, Kimilsungia, Kimjongilia, mouth, password, patience, refuge, sentience, shadowbox, similes, telepathy, tillandsia, touch-me-not)
Forgotten War (1812)
Forgotten War (1950–ongoing)
Frankenstein, Victor (see also: model minority)
Freeze
Fugiō
Fugue (see also: counterpoint, dialogue, flight, voice)
Fungibility (of Asians; see also: anti-Asian violence, capitalism, fetish)
Future, foreshortened (see also: black holes)

Geography (see also: Demilitarized Zone)
Geomancy (see also: Demilitarized Zone)
~~God~~
God, forsaken
Grades, bad (see also: abecedarian, F minor)
Grammar
Grandfather (see: elegy)
Grandmother (see: tiger)
Guilt, Catholic
Guilt, forgiven
Guilt, inherited
Guilt, Korean American
Guilt, survivor's

Haenyeo (see also: Ku-Reum)
Han (see also: 한, colonialism, hwabyung, Korea, oppression, resentment)

Hangul (see: 한글)
Home, always searching for
Hospitalization(s)
Hostage
Hurricane (see: Mom)
Hwabyung (see also: 화병, activism, catharsis, death, fire, grandfather, han, injustice, Ku-Reum, pain, superpower, transformation, volcano)

I (as ~~ambivalent~~ pronoun)
I, "discomfort woman"
Ideation
Identity/identities
Imbalance (see: power)
Independence Day (see also: 4, fire, war, my rapist's favorite holiday)
Injury
Injustice
Interchangeability (as superpower, as weakness; see also: anti-Asian violence, fetishes, fungibility, uncanny valley)
Intergenerational trauma (see: ghosts)
International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Jae-in Doe (see: Doe, Jae-in)
Jennie (as "deadname")
Jindo (as Korean dog, as Jae-in Doe's "other")
Justice, deferred
Justice, denied
Justice, restorative
Juxtaposition (see: this poem)

Keys (see also: answers, chogakbo, dissociation, doors, dream minor, education, English major, F minor, fugues, H minor, hope, locks, maps, math, music, translation, wrists)
Kimilsungia
Kimjongilia
Korea, divided

Korea, North
Korea, South
Korean War
Koreas, many
Koreas, unified
Ku-Reum (see also: 구름, cloud, Korea, one/they)

Labyrinth
Language
Leash
Leaves (from mental portfolios, of absence, of trees, symmetrical)
Libraries (see: rape, Stanford)
Literalization
Locks, some of which are impossible to answer (see also: question)
Love (see also: family)

"Madison Jefferson Copy Paradise Lost $150,000"
Makeup, cosmetic
Makeup, cosmic
Makeup, genetic
Maps
Mary (see also: Catholicism, Mom, prayer, suicide, virginity)
Math
Me, too (see: 2017)
Metamorphosis (see: ourself)
Metonymy
Mirrors (see also: makeup, Mom, uncanny valley)
Misogyny
Model minority (as monstrous, as mythic, as stereotype)
Model minotaur (see also: autocorrect, "model minority," ooloi)
Mom (see also: 엄마, alien, anger, blood, Catholicism, dreams, eyelids, han, hurricane, hwabyung, Korea, love, makeup, Mary, Omma, prayer, punishment)
Mount Paektu (see also: caldera, Korea, Mom, volcano)

Museums
Mutant clocks (see also: ghosts, jet lag, time travel)
Myopia (see also: Young Choo)

Names (see also: 한글, "American," anonymous, "difficult," Doe, hyphens, Jae-in Doe/도재인, Jennie Chu, Korean pronunciation, Ku-Reum, mispronunciation, misspelling, romanization, Seo-Young, significance, Un-Jen, Un-Na, Young Choo)
Nerves
Networks, whisper (see also: secrecy, voice)
"No," I said
No thank you
No way out
Nobody, I'm
November (see also: brain, depression, gloom, Mom)

Objects (see also: artifacts, blazon, books, capitalism, desire, grammar, possession, robots, subjects)
Omma (see also: 엄마, Mom, Mother, November, Omoni, Umma)
One/they (see also: Koreas, Ku-Reum, mathematics, other, plurality, self, unification)
Order, alphabetical
Order, chronological (see also: time travel)
Order, out of
Orientalism
Orphan (see: Dad)
Ourself
Oxymoron (see: I)

Pain physical and mental and spiritual
Peace, remembered (see: Forgotten War)
Personhood
Persons (see also: animation, DMZ, grammar, humanoid, I, life, lifelikeness, objects, one/they, personhood, rights, robots, singular vs. plural, subjectivity)

Plot holes
Plot twists
Polyptoton (see also: fugue/refuge/refugee, empathy/passionflower/pathos/telepathy)
Postmemory
Post-password economy of trust
Prayer (as invisible technology, as engine for generating a new second-person object)
~~President~~
Private-facing (see also: DMZ, North Korea, secret, volcano)
~~Professor~~ Professor
Pronunciation, "incorrect"
PTSD (as "Please Try Something Different," as "Post Traumatic Stress Dream," as otherworldly time zone)
Punishment, corporal (see also: Mom)
Pyongyang

Queens College, CUNY
Queerness
Question (as a kind of lock, left unanswered; see also: empathy test, exam, family, love, plot holes, prayer, secret)
Questionnaires

~~Rape~~
Rape culture (see also: America, Stanford, the world)
Rape, forgotten (see also: Forgotten War)
Refuge, first (academia, books)
Refuge, second (new name/identity)
Refuge, third (_____)
Refugee
Renaming
Repetition
Reunification
Rhyme (see also: Forgotten Wars)
Robots (see also: Dad, museum, orphan)
Romanization (see also: 한글, Englishes, hangul, misspelling, mistranslation)

Rootlessness
Rusk, Dean (see also: Charles Bonesteel, DMZ, Korea, war)

School, "good"
Science fiction
Self (as a kind of DMZ, as a kind of Korea, as plural, as a cognitively estranging referent, as the conflicted subject of this memoir—the key purpose of which may be to make myself finally legible, available for representation, and therefore free)
~~Self-hatred~~
"She, how could she" (see also: aunt, free indirect discourse, Mom)
Silence (of Japan, of Mom, of Stanford)
Skin (see also: blazon, contusions, sonnet, yellow)
Soliloquy (vs. dialogic fugue)
Sonnet (as lyric form, as site of sexual violence; see also: blazon)
Spear (see: my mother's voice)
Stanford (see also: injury, injustice, rape, rape culture)
Stigma (see also: blood, Catholicism, destigmatization, mental illness, Mom, rape, stigmata, trauma, vulnerability, wounds)
Stitches (see also: blazon, counterpoint, Frankenstein's creature, I, model minority, pain, stigma, suicide)
~~Strikethrough (as evidence of ambivalence, as poetic device, as symptom of trauma)~~
Suicide
~~Superhero~~
Survival
Syllable blocks (see also: 한글)
Syllabus ("Time is what hurts"; "turn around to face the sources you are asked to cite")

Tests
Textures
Tiger, Korean
Tillandsia (see also: air, roots)

Timelines (see also: lines of time; strumming)
Time travel (see also: this book)
Touch-me-not (see also: consent, DMZ, flower, Korea, rape)
Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)
Transformation (see also: metamorphosis)
Translation (see also: metamorphosis)
Trauma
(see……)
~~Typos~~ (see also: daughter, model minotaur)

Uncanny, the (see also: I)
Unification (see also: I)
United Korea
United States of
Un-Jen
Us, all of us

Valleys, uncanny (see also: DMZ, fetishes, home, interchangeability, mirrors, mountains, North Korea, robots, self)
Ventriloquism
Victims, "special" (see also: Olivia Benson)
Violence, sexual
Violent blur (see also: eyes, Young Choo)
Virgin birth (see also: Mary)
Virginia (as birthplace)
Voices (see also: dialogue, fugue, silence, soliloquy)
Volcanoes (see also: ancestors, caldera, catharsis, dream, fire, hwabyung, mother, Mount Paektu, North Korea)
Vs. (see also: consciousness, Koreas, living, oxymoron, self)

Walls (see also: agoraphobia, labyrinth, mirrors, model minotaur)
War
War, _____
War, ~~forgotten~~ ~~forgiven~~ forsaken

War war war war war war war war war war war war aura autocorrect (see also: ceasefire, ceasefire, ceasefire, ceasefire)
We
"We are so sorry, but"
Whanganui River (see also: Demilitarized Zone, personhood)
"Women" (see also: pronunciation)

X_____ (see also: agreeability, agreement, autobiography, autographs, consent, contracts, names, signatures)
Xenomorph (see also: blazon, coroner, daughter, Jae-in Doe, Octavia Butler, soliloquy, victims)
Xenophobia (see also: anti-Asian violence)

Yale (see also: hospitalization, suicide, Western Canon)
Yes (see also: consent)
You (as addressee, as grammatical category, as object, as "the reader")
Young Choo (the name that New York Presbyterian Hospital wrote on a bag containing my belongings, including my high-prescription eyeglasses, at the beginning of my psychiatric stay in 2016; when I asked for my eyeglasses as I could barely see without them, the hospital—having written the wrong name on the bag—could not find my belongings, so they concluded that I was delusionally pretending to need eyeglasses; see also: violent blur)

Zao (see also: North Korea, orientalism, stereotypes, uncanny valley)
"Zeroer and zeroer fucks left to give"
Zigzag (as a form of reading, as a form of time travel)
Zones (danger, demilitarized, of time)

Possible Answer Key to This Book

(skip this section if you would rather solve the book yourself)

A Refuge for Jae-in Doe and Other Fugues is written mostly in the first-person singular. Each chapter — each fugue or cluster of fugues — corresponds to a particular key in which the "I" speaks. All of the "I"s exist in tension and dialogue with one another as well as with other sites of autobiographical consciousness. Together they speak in a kind of polyphonic "fugue" evocative not only of musical fugues but also of fugue states as well as etymologically related and relevant words such as "refuge," "fugitive," and "refugee."

Preceding the book's main chapters are two experimental paratexts — "Openings" and "Imperfect Concordance" — that introduce the reader to the book's main themes, textures, tones, and key terms. "Openings" and "Imperfect Concordance" also function as content warnings.

In the first main chapter, "Translator of Soliloquies: A Fugue in the Key of Dissociation," the first-person "I" is a hospitalized queer Korean American victim of sexual violence and fetishization. In struggling to "translate" her trauma from dissocia-

tive soliloquy into real-life dialogue with other people, she also struggles with the mystery of selfhood: Who am I? The writing here relies heavily on surrealism, braiding, obliqueness, metafictional elements, and intentional withholding of information to convey the "I"'s detachment from reality.

In the second main chapter, "Free Indirect Suicide: An Unfinished Fugue in H Minor," the Korean American "I" approaches family and generational distress as a kind of free indirect discourse, using a variety of techniques — e.g., braiding, dream visions, other-than-first-person pronouns, excerpts from medical reports, meter, rhyme, collage-like juxtapositions, and examples of free indirect speech — to manage her first-person feelings of being haunted and physically battered by secondhand suicidal ideation and inherited war trauma.

In the third main chapter, "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major," the Korean American "I" is called upon (through a literal phone call) to re-live her seventeen-years-ago rape in the year 2000 by her then-adviser in the Stanford English Department. Through re-living the rape and its complex aftermath, she begins to reconcile her younger self ("Jennie") with her current self ("Seo-Young") through the figure of "Jae-in Doe" (an enigmatic Korean American "Jane Doe"). Here, too, the "I" uses other-than-first-person pronouns as well as collage-like juxtapositions, documentary evidence, and lyric poems written "after" Dickinsonian hymn stanzas and canonical sonnets (e.g., sonnets by Shakespeare, Yeats, Milton, Donne) to organize her ideations, emotions, flashbacks, and dreams. While the chapter opens with a sickening "invocation," near the end it incorporates elements of cathartic activism and advocacy, finally closing on a dissonant note: "I am one of the lucky ones."

In the fourth main chapter, "I, Discomfort Woman: A Fugue in F Minor," the "I" speaks in multiple voices (e.g., the frozen rape

victim, the furious and defiant survivor, the trenchant critic, the meticulous scholar, the Korean American daughter, the speculative poet). The "I"'s voices figuratively rhyme and resonate with one another while recounting again her violation at Stanford and the institutional betrayal she has experienced in its wake as well as in the wake of #MeToo. Whereas the earlier fugues in the book are voluminously multi-vocal and expansively contrapuntal, "I, Discomfort Woman" is a more concise manifestation of the fugue form.

In the fifth main chapter, "IMF: A Fugue," the "I" continues to use a compact rather than expansive form of the fugue. Here the "I" experiments with tightly braided multiple voices as well as formatting (e.g., underlining) and alternatives to "International Monetary Fund" as an acronym for "IMF" (e.g., "immaculately mothered fetuses" — a reference to her mother's obsession with the Virgin Mary). In the process, she begins to reckon with her own privilege, guilt, agency, accountability, and pain as the daughter (the child-as-"developing-nation") of an awe-inspiring and beloved father who was orphaned by the Korean War as a child, who grew up to work for the neocolonial International Monetary Fund (IMF), who is currently suffering from leukemia, and whose legacy both inspires and haunts the lyric speaker.

In the sixth main chapter, "Science-Fictional North Korea: A Defective Fugue," the "I" disappears into a more scholarly voice, experimentally placing Gregorian calendars in dialogue with North Korean calendars to synthesize a disorienting history of the multiple Koreas that have so vividly shaped the "I"'s own identity.

In the seventh main chapter, "Dream Life of Waste: Fugues in the Key of Capitalism," the "I" resumes her exploration of timelines, chronology, and history. Here she synchronizes expiration dates of expired products in her home with journal entries corresponding to those dates, organizing the entries in chronological order by date of obsolescence. In the process, she revisits

multiple events and themes introduced in earlier chapters in the book, including suicidality, queer desire, her rape at Stanford, her hospitalizations as a mentally ill patient, her complicated relationship to her family, and her fractured identity as a Korean American survivor.

In the eighth and final main chapter, "Imagining an Asian American Superhero of North Korean Origin: Fantasias and Fugues in the Key of Hope," the "I" once again disappears into a kind of scholarly voice. Here, too, the scholarly voice is hybrid and impure, mixing academic prose with lyric poetry and speculative fiction to transform the figure of "Jae-in Doe" into "Ku-Reum"/"Cloud": an Asian American ~~superhero~~ of North Korean origin. Whereas *A Refuge for Jae-in Doe and Other Fugues* opens in the keys of dissociation and Korean han/hwabyung, the book closes on a note at once hopeful, futuristic, and apocalyptic.

Attached to the end of the book are a number of paratexts, including an epilogue in the form of experimental examples of questions and prompts that both playfully mimic and meaningfully subvert the kinds of standardized academic exercises towards which the "I" remains ambivalent as current professor, former student, and recovering model minority.

Between and among the sections described above are brief interludes that serve as the literary equivalent of conjunctions and punctuation marks.

Throughout the book the Korean Demilitarized Zone runs like a thread, a dotted line, a concertina wire fence, a recurring motif.

~~*concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire*~~
~~*concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire*~~
~~*concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire*~~
~~*concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire*~~
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Pop Quiz

At what point does *Dictee* (1982) by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha begin?

(A) "Tell me the story"
(B) an enigmatic black-and-white landscape that makes direct contact with darkness when the book is shut
(C) "Open paragraph"
(D) "Aller à la ligne"
(E) war
(F) [frontispiece (verso): high-contrast black-and-white picture of a dark surface etched with Hangul letters: "어머니 보고싶어. 배가고파요. 고향에 가고싶다."]
(G) "TO MY MOTHER TO MY FATHER"
(H) March 4, 1951
(I) right now
(J) the near future
(K) the distant past
(L) these eyes, filling with dear shapes that blur
(M) Korea
(N) [blank space]
(O) in country code 82
(P) it does not begin

(Q) when it ends
(R) between North and South
(S) the 38th parallel
(T) the zeroth page
(U) the square root of minus page one
(V) _____
(W) this silence
(X) *this* silence
(Y) "tell even us"
(Z) ~~none~~ all of the above

~~(Pop quiz: At what point does this book begin?)~~

Translator of Soliloquies: A Fugue in the Key of Dissociation

Intake Questionnaire, Section 3b
This story is populated by many pronouns and characters. Will you keep track of them?

If so, then say "yes."

If not, then don't say anything.

Your response is being recorded by an invisible device.

From the Neural Transcript
Nobody knows that I'm here.

Not that I know where "here" is located.

I do seem to know that "here" is a place where I am instructed to be "patient." A place where I have been instructed by a certain Dialectical School of Mental Conduct to try to do the opposite of what I feel like doing.

For example:

I do not feel like telling this story. Therefore, I am telling this story.

Enigma 2: They Possess the Nature of Guided Meditations, but They Are Not Identical to Guided Meditations

How did I enter this building, and how will I find my way out?

Elevators open onto stairways.

Stairways — spiral, always spiral — ascend or descend or descend and ascend, only to keep arriving at the same abundantly redundant level.

Stairways — spiral, always spiral — descend or ascend or ascend and descend, only to keep arriving at the same unfamiliarly familiar level.

Stop. Please. Just for a moment. I need to orient myself.

Let me try another elevator. (Have I been in this elevator before?) I am inside the elevator now. The doors close. Briefly I experience the sensation of being carried either up or down — I can't tell which. Then the doors open, and:

Another spiral stairway.

Stop. Let me think.

Windows. Shouldn't there be windows?

But windows are completely absent.

I am beginning to suspect that there is no such thing as "outside."

How is it then that I can see at all? Strangely light is visible, but its sources are invisible. No lamps of any kind…

And there is the matter of time. What time is it in here? Is there a clock somewhere, anywhere? Yes. Here. There. And there. In fact, clocks abound: they adorn walls; they hang suspended from ceilings; they lie patiently face up on tables as if waiting to be examined. The more clocks I find, the more space seems to expand. So many clocks! The presence of which suggests the existence of some way of telling time…

But closer inspection reveals that each clock face is afflicted with — the heart stops, momentarily — an alarming surplus of hands, as though (image of centipedes; why?) something is causing strange mutations (image of centipedes, again) in time, in temporality, in the fourth dimension itself…

And then there are the rooms. The various rooms. Rooms in which — disjointedly — I find myself mysteriously contextualized and re-contextualized, again and again.

In one room the floor palpitates with apparitions of metal.

In another room the walls are tiled with placards that say "ZMD Analyzer," "Secret of Frequency X," and "JNE-25 Core Memory."

(Who or what is doing this to me?)

In yet another room a banner reads "HUMANOID ARTIFACTS FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RUIN," but none of the robots on display are shaped like human beings. Instead the tables are littered with insects — beetles, ants, crickets, dragonflies — whose delicately constructed limbs bring to mind the word "calligraphy." Each insect is as large as my hand. When I pick one up, I notice the phrase "syllable block" printed in Times New Roman on its metallic underside. The robot is apparently lifeless; it fails or perhaps refuses to respond to the probing of my fingertips. No alarms go off. No guards are around to warn: "Please do not touch." After the passage of a minute, or maybe an hour, or maybe a day, I finally place the lifeless robot insect back onto the dissection table where it belongs.

The last item I see is located at the end of a long straight corridor. From a distance, it looks like a rainbow hovering inside a glass case. As I walk toward this glass case, the rainbow gradually transforms into a holographic image — spectral, iridescent — of the back of a woman's head. The head is life-sized. It appears to float by itself, suspended in illuminated air. The rest of the body is missing. The shape of the glass case is cylindrical, and the illusion is meant to be viewed along a 180-degree curve. Depending on the situation of the viewer, this three-dimensional mirage is pink, yellow, turquoise, or violet. It is constantly shimmering because the viewer is never standing still.

I cannot recall at what point I recognize who she is. I do know that it happens before she turns to face me, smiles, opens her mouth, and says something in a language I don't understand. When I move in the opposite direction, everything happens in reverse: X says something (backward this time) in a language I

don't understand, closes her mouth, stops smiling, removes her gaze from my eyes, and turns away.

I repeat this process — left to right, right to left — several times. The glass reflects the puzzle of my face. Of course, I wish this reflection did not exist. I want to see X's face without having to see my own. I want my contact with her to be as pure and as un-puzzled as possible. I want to grasp the essence of what she is trying to say.

But she is speaking in two languages I cannot understand: the sound of K____ and the sound of K____ spoken backward.

The title of the hologram, which I notice just before the alarm finally does go off and I have no choice but to exit, is "Something Something Armistice Something Something Amnesia."

U-N 5: Leaves of Disappearance

Scientists in West K____ have invented a new category of absence. The impact, they say, is shaped "approximately" like the outline of her body. Had you been asked to identify the remains, they might have said the impact is shaped "exactly" like the outline of her body. Yet this is not exactly an equation. No one was ever equal to the occasion. Sorry, but you are looking for something that isn't here. When the outline is removed, the impact leaves you vacant. In fact, the imprint will leave you vacant of everything — everything except for something called "shock." No two people are exactly equal to any occasion. The shock, however, is temporary, and you were never asked to identify anything, anything except for the leaves on the ground. After great shock, there is often confusion. The impulse is to follow every neuropath until the answer is uncovered in time. After a great storm, the leaves on the ground are impossible to identify. Outlines: disintegrated. Matter: disintegrated. Even the impact of fingerprints: disintegrated. "We are so sorry," but you are looking for a presence that isn't here.

Intake Questionnaire, Section 2a
Are you the kind of reader who needs to know what the story is "about"? We are committed to the satisfaction of our guests. But we are also responsible for the security of our characters. Inasmuch as every client is vital to us, a balance must be struck.

Therefore this story can be said to be "about" the following matters: time travel, K-pathy, tests, voltage, surveillance, two women in love, dedication, solace, arms, unthinkable things, nests, birds of prey, a sudden blow, seizures, blood, song, loss, how to survive reintegration, parts of speech, eschatology, "something," the search for a cure, the search for a missing person, the wish to forget, poison, gardening, botany, "no," rocks, attacks of identity, "no," discovery of aliens, recovery, minerals, setback, minerals, "no," posthypnotic seclusion, locks, wrist-like doorknobs, evidence, avoidance, reminders, "no," "no," unlocked bracelets, beaded wrists, "no," a string of beads, a string of memories of "no," wrists being locked, doctors, raptors, captors, feathers, tests, voltage, the ethics of cloning, rhyme, biofeedback, relearning language, unlearning silence, mouths, the point at which someone turns into someone else, names, games, espionage, phones, homophones, phobia, shutdowns, amnesty, denial, acceptance, roots, unfinished witness, unfulfilled vows, love, bodies, conjunction, consonance unavowed, the garden next door, folklore, handmade artifacts, alien hands, and possible side effects ranging from aversion to disorientation. Do you agree to accept such risks? If so, sign below:

X_____

U-N 1: What Not to Do When Choosing a Passage
Whenever Un-Na walked past the doorway — and she did so almost daily, for the doorway was an entrance to a building in her neighborhood — the same five words would come to mind automatically.

plush chromosome fugue reunify stereoscopic

For some reason (Un-Na had no idea why) the sequence of words never changed.

For some reason (Un-Na had no idea why) she never thought to cross the threshold, even though the doorway was always open.

As for what the doorway framed:

The doorway framed what appeared to be an optical illusion.

The illusion: organized chaos of blossoms, blossoms receding unceasingly into some kind of distance.

From the Neural Transcript

Not that Un-Jen is my real name. My real name is "difficult." Or so I've been told. But Un-Jen might as well be my real name. Especially if you consider the fact that I am somewhat — how to put it? — interchangeable.

Not that I mind, of course, being interchangeable. The ability to be interchanged is a rather special ability.

Interchangeability: a subtle superpower.

Interchangeability: invisibility of a different hue.

Interchangeability: a gift.

It is because of this gift, moreover, that I have been saved.

Saved by the perceived color of my hair.

Saved by the perceived shape of my eyes.

Saved from being an unwilling participant.

Saved from being the main character of this very story — a story of which I want no part.

What you are reading is a subjective account meant to free me from "what actually happened."

Not that "what actually happened" necessarily happened to Un-Jen.

Not that any of this is "what actually happened."

Attempted Diagnosis
K____ is a condition in which K____s within the same K____ have a different K____. This condition can affect any type of K____, including: K____ and K____.

Symptoms include: Dark Mysterious Zero, the number 38, Dear Please Return Key, concertina wire, tunnels, non-identical twins, violence, guilt, postmemory, undiscovered country, and Un-Jen.

U-N 2: Humanoid @ and Un-Humanoid #
It resembled neither a mouth nor an ear nor an outstretched hand, yet those were the first three images (a woman's voluptuous mouth; a feline ear nervously twitching; a child-sized hand outstretched) that the flower seemed to evoke in Un-Na's mind.

The shade of each petal was oddly alive: the palest tint of "cinnabar" (not literally cinnabar) on the perpetual verge of "blue" (a blue that struck Un-Na less as color, more as blunt force pain).

When Un-Na touched the bloom, at once the petals answered her by drinking her fingerprints. Soundlessly they drank and drank until one by one each fingertip had been sipped into a state of printlessness.

When Un-Na leaned in more closely to breathe in the flower's tone, a sudden absence of emotion began to fill her heart.

Slowly, like condensation, it came to her attention that somehow tears of nondescript emotion were traveling down the features of her face.

(Later, much later, Un-Na learned that the flower was recollecting the tears of nondescript emotion for future use.)

Once the tears had subsided, once the absence of emotion was complete, Un-Na realized that the flower was returning her own gaze. With unthinkable gravity and unthinkable care, the flower was staring from its core into the core of Un-Na's brain.

Everything stayed this way for a very long while.

Over the course of timelessness Un-Na and the flower turned into an exquisite corpse — awaiting the handmade coffin where finally it might rest in peace.

Over the course of timelessness Un-Na and the flower turned into a still life — awaiting the handmade shadowbox where finally it might feel at home.

From the Neural Transcript

I, Un-Jen, am on some kind of "leave of absence" (or so I've been told).

What exactly does a leave of absence look like? I can't help but wonder. Is it shaped like a leaf? A leaf of absence. I am trying to visualize it. I am trying to draw a picture of it in what once upon a time was called "my mind." But there are so many different shapes that a leaf can take. Lobate. Scalloped. Tripinnatisect. One could go on…

The lovely thing about shapes of leaves is this: shapes of leaves = shapes of leaves.

Shapes of leaves can be trusted.

Shapes of leaves do not breach the flesh of women.

Shapes of leaves do not whisper syllables infesting the tissues of the brain.

(Verbatim: "You look just like all the other A___n w____ that I've ____ed" or "You're not really a d___ are you? You don't look like a d___.")

Shapes of leaves, if told "no please don't please stop," would not do the opposite of what they're being told to do.

(Verbatim: "Does your girlfriend look like you? I bet she does. Make sure to tell her that ___ ___ __ __ _ _____")

Sorry, but you

(shaking)

Sorry, but you are looking for

(shaking uncontrollable shaking)

Sorry, but you are looking for something that isn't

(shaking shaking shaking the most horrible shaking)

Sorry, but

( )

Not that I know where "here" is

(At what point during the shaking did I?)

If only the shapes of leaves were what kept me up at night instead of

(What did the shaking do to me?)

leaves leaves leaves leaves leave

U-N 3: notes written in haste (left behind)

Still bright out when the fighting begins. TV running same newscast over and over. The more we fight the darker the room. (Later, imagine this room as a form without shape. Empty something adrift in nothing. Where afternoon keeps verging on the end of day.)

Fighting for 1 hour (or more than 1 hour?) when change occurs. Sense of "now" takes on attributes of reminiscence. Begin to feel (vaguely) haunted. As if today were long ago. From future: older self using this body to re-live this experience. X and I struggling to commit lines to memory. Lines once held so close, growing stranger with repetition. Eventually we must turn into 2 people who have yet to meet… Returning to those 2 people: how long until I observe X's eyes and find that other life (that otherworldly life) observing me as well (and with such equal yearning)? An event without hinges. Out of nowhere: X's voice re-whispers into my ear: "There's a gift waiting for us in my apartment. Let's go open the gift…" Syl-la-bles ramifying through body. Desire spread into every root, until her voice

Stop it.

An event without hinges. Out of nowhere, her voice:

Stop it!

Did he listen when she said those words?

"Stop" and "it." "Stop it."

Stop it please.

I, too, have desired her. Does that make me _____?

Stop. It.

Stupid.

Stop it just stop this is unbearable

Attempted Diagnosis: Second Opinion
Syndrome of Personification of Nation. At some point, she began to mutate, horribly, into a personification of the Numerator Kin whose Denominator Kin = the official homeland of her parents. Time rendered the parallels increasingly vivid. Both she and her Numerator Kin are haunted by the fact that they were forced to experience violence against their wills. Both she and her Numerator Kin have responded to their experiences by self-isolating into reclusive entities. Both she and her Numerator Kin have lost the capacity to trust the "reality" that supposedly lives beyond their borders, borders that they have built to protect themselves. Both she and her Numerator Kin are misunderstood by family members who used to love them and whom they still love.

U-N 4: notes on commutations and equations (left behind, continued)
"Do you seriously wish you could trade places with me? Is that what you're trying to say?"

Things have changed.
"Things have changed."
Things have changed.

X = asleep.
I = awake.

That = then.
This = now.

"Unhinged."

"Do you seriously wish you could trade places with me? Is that what you're trying to say?"

Would I trade places with her? Answer her! Oh God, there I go talking to myself again.

TV repeating same news, same news, same news.

Anchorwoman: "Scientists in West K____ have created human embryos through cloning. The embryos are devastated when the stem cells are removed."

How many times already have I heard those words today?

I wonder if today is still today.

What X said to me today (if in fact today is still today): "You have no right to tell me what to do. You're not the one who was"

What I had said to X today (if in fact today is still today): "Please… Report… You have to…"

Scientists in West K____ have created human embryos through cloning. The embryos are devastated when the stem cells are removed

This is no longer news. Will you stop it please

Scientists in West K____ have created human embryos through cloning. The embryos are devastated when the stem cells are removed

I'm not the one who

"…solar plexus… unbearable nonstop pain…"

Something needs to stop, because I feel

"… just can't make it stop… and this has gone too far…"

very far. Retreating

"… so please break up with me. That's what I want, okay? Just leave."

into distances too vast,

"Leave. Leave, leave leave. Leave me alone. LEAVE."

too vast to follow

From the Neural Transcript
Even though I am on a leave of absence, I still have a brain — or rather I still have some kind of brain.

(Did the scarecrow have a brain? I can't remember.)

The brain I have is being mutated by shocked dots that in high doses can be toxic.

The brain I have feels like a graveyard where hazardous waste materials go to die.

I wonder if I am lonely in this place called "here." I am quite sure that I'm not alone. Of course, I'll never be entirely certain. In any case, I choose to believe that I can sense the presence of others around me. They too seem to be on leaves of absence.

We are all leaves of an absent tree. A tree of unthinkable absence. An absent tree dying to will itself into living presence.

We are all dying, I think, to be as patient as possible.

(The puns and the oxymorons and their dumb family members are here to stay. They might as well be tolerated.)

We are all here, I think, because we are missing the forms, the forms that we once knew how to fill out by ourselves.

We are all here, I think, because we have lost track of our outlines, and without such outlines we will unavoidably disappear.

The truth, a truth that the Instructors here find "troubling" and "sad," is that some of us don't want our outlines back. Some of us just want to disappear.

That's one of the few truths that I do understand.

Some of us "just want to disappear."

Attempted Diagnosis: Third Opinion
Bi-Nat'l Doom Missed Order
Borderline (Delta Mike Zulu) Doom Mist Hoarder

U-N 6: ghostwritten in haste (sleeper)
Dreams from previous night = 4 dreams interlinked.

In dream#1: 25 y/ago. I am holding (someone else's) baby in my arms. I wonder what she will look like now. If it's 25 y/ago, and the baby is 1 y/old, then she must be 26 y/old today. (Double check math?)

In dream#2: anonymous woman walks up to me and hands me wrinkled paper. One side blank, other side covered w (random?) symbols. "I left it here accidentally. Please give it back," woman explains before disappearing.

In dream#3: I give the wrinkled paper back to 26-y/old baby who says "Thanks, I was wondering where this was." Then the 2 of us study each other's eyes (search for what? reflection?). Wrinkled paper suddenly rings like a phone. No one answers.

In dream#4: I receive a wrinkled piece of e-mail saying 27-y/old baby "passed away." No, no, can't be true, I think to myself over and over. Phone ringing (again?). "Hello," 26-year-old baby answers from empty silhouette.

Open eyes.

What time is it? Is it still today?

A woman named X = asleep on that bed. (This is not an equation.)

How did she find herself here?

A woman-shaped heap of blankets and pillows sleeping on that bed.

How could X be someone, anyone, whose existence can endure?

Attempted Diagnosis: Fourth Opinion
Positive Thinking Seeks Denial
Prepare To Suffer Deeply
Please Try Something Different
Plan Tired Soul Death
Please Try Something Different

Intake Questionnaire, Section 3d
Are you the kind of person who cares about plot — the kind of person who needs to know who the main characters are and what is happening to them?

Okay, then. Here you go. SPOILERS AHEAD.

Two women fall in love. Both women are Korean American. Neither woman has been with another Korean American woman before. They resonate. Have their souls met before in an earlier lifetime? Their souls mate. They resonate. They infatuate.

Shortly after they meet, the two women move in together. For a while they lead a happy life. The happiness of their life together is relatively irrelevant to this particular story. This particular story has to do with the event that alters the two women's happiness. One of the two women is ____d by a stranger. After this event takes place, the two begin to argue with growing

frequency. The woman who was ____d becomes obsessed with North Korea and at some point goes missing. The woman who was not ____d tries to find her other half, but answers elude her. More and more she is haunted by guilt and dread.

Where did the missing woman go? Is she still alive? Is she still Korean? Is she still American? Is she still human? Did she go underground? Will she ever get back together with her girlfriend, the one who is looking for her?

Does this plot summary mean anything to you? If not, you are hereby given permission to leave.

There. You have been successfully deleted from this story.

Enigma 1: They Possess the Nature of Nightmares, but They Are Not Identical to Nightmares

I am told to sit down. I sit down. Soon my left arm lies across the table. Something is attached to the wrist of my left arm and the Teller must pry it open. The thing she must pry open is a fist.

"Let… me… see…," the Teller says cautiously.

This is ridiculous. Who sent me to this place? Am I under arrest? I don't recall anyone reading me my rights.

What is she trying to do to my arm?

Why does my arm feel so strange?

My eyes avert themselves from the revolting procedure unfolding on the table. They find a life-sized photograph of the Teller's face hanging on the wall directly above her head. Framed in oval opalescence, the Teller's face is soft. I can't help but fasten my gaze to the softness. My vision is losing its focus, losing itself in the blurs and the luminous bruises of dissonance among the iridescent hues.

("Why do you avoid looking directly at…?" I will later remember being asked.)

The fist, the thing attached to the wrist of my right arm, begins to turn into something else.

Later, though not much later, the Teller says out loud:

"A name. Her name. Starting with the letter… X…"

With a scarlet felt-tipped pen she has been annotating my hand. Already the surface of my palm is a bright red map of crisscrossing lines. The letter X over and over again, italicized, non-italicized, emboldened, cursive, re-X-ed, re-X-ed again, X and X and X and X and X until the X-es blotch illegibly.

"Yours, however. Yours is tricky… as if there were a prefix… such as… De… No, not that one… Re? Re-Something… Re… Me. No. Do. Re. So. De. Re. No. Re. Un… Un-Something… Un-Nat… No, no, that sounds… off… somehow. … Un, Un… Un… Un-Ha? Ha! Un-Ha! Yes, that is yours… meaning, I believe, or so I am told, galaxy, in some other language…"

When the Teller speaks again, the shade of her voice has darkened. Her sentences take place more urgently.

"…Those voices I hear from the day you met… another K____ woman before? Me neither… but why should it feel so diff… the one with no accent… the second one, who is it, in some kind of danger… the one who has trouble understanding what K____ means. The other one… It's not the same. You have no idea what it's like. Even if I tried… the weight of it… whether it floats in water… survive, unclear, or nuclear…"

And then the Teller is busy changing the costume of her voice.

"… side by side… fabric of whatever you were… inside out, seams and… touching, then… fingers… speechlessly… skin… candesce… wandering… struck waves… bright… outline… of bodies… disappeared… blaze that ebbed and… left… shimmering in dark…"

After a great silence, the Teller resumes:

"I hear X playing a musical instrument that reflects light. Silver? She said the word "gift" so carefully, as though it teemed with accents, accents from all over the universe. And what was waiting for you in her home? What kind of language was found asleep, dreaming, inside the box?… Did you pass the identity test? How perfectly, imperfectly, did your reaction imitate the gift itself?"

This time the Teller seems to be measuring the distance between me and the life-sized photograph of the Teller's face.

"Have you heard of humanoid robots?… They possess the nature of human beings. But they are not identical to human beings. One of you possesses the form and nature of a K____ woman. But you are not identical to a K____ woman."

The red diagram on my palm has grown into a complicated web. I am mesmerized, tranquilized, amazed by its growth.

"…which is why the separation caused such…"

The web seems alive.

"…was not too much loss of blood, luckily…"

Heaviness of silence. Absorption.

In approximately one hour, I will wake up to find spider bites all over my right hand, which is numb.

Enigma 3: They Possess the Nature of Fantasies, but They Are Not Identical to Fantasies

This time X sits in the middle of an audience full of robots. The robots resemble human beings, and why wouldn't they?

I am on a stage. X watches me but I am unaware of her presence in the room.

Somewhere onstage a television is tuned to a 24-hour news channel. The anchorwoman announces that "scientists in West K____ have invented a telepathic voice-box. The verb stems are destroyed when the verb endings are removed." For reasons I don't yet understand, my brain translates the last sentence as "The flower stems are destroyed when the nerve endings are removed."

As I mentioned earlier, I am on a stage. Let me guess. I am an actress playing a role. Apparently I am in a scene where I've just met someone named Oh. Unlike X's chopped shocked cropped obsidian hair, Oh's hair is made of long blond optic fibers and cables flowing down her shoulders. Unlike X's eyes, which are full of shadowy archival depths, Oh's eyes are so faint their translucency is virtually colorless.

"You tend to dichotomize too much," tells me this woman named Oh, and several moments pass before I realize that Oh has been reading my thoughts.

"I know you," I say, the words emerging from my lips in a manner half-questioning and half-declarative. I've seen her before. She might be famous. I try to decipher her features. "Why do you look so familiar?"

"Shhhhhhhh, don't ask why," Oh murmurs. "Let me tell you a secret." Degree by degree, she tilts her head towards mine, studying invisible and intimate geometries, until her jaw rests on a subtle angle — all of a sudden a delicate chord resonates through me, as though I have become her violin — and then she whispers slowly into my ear.

I am still oblivious to the fact that X has been watching from her seat in the audience. X's face is expressionless. Her eyes are full of depths so shadowy that the sockets look deserted. I begin to suspect that she herself has become a robot. I begin to wonder if I would be able to tell the difference between robot X and the X I used to know.

Oh's breath is very warm; it is transmuting my ear, molecule by molecule, into an alien organ. Temperatures rise. There are many points during the process at which I can't help but sigh out loud her name. When the transmutation is complete, when she is done whispering in what used to be my ear, Oh takes my hand and pulls me offstage, beyond X's field of vision.

The voices steaming, pouring, from our bodies sound like voices going backward in time, voices unlearning correct articulation. (All of this must be part of the script.) With less and less ease, with more and more need, we are drinking the speech right out of each other's mouths. We are muting and mating and mutating the language in the magma where our minds intersect. We are struggling to wrest back an experience that neither of us can recall having experienced. We must unbolt the past, even if it means X-ing each other, even if it means prying open each other's steel. We must find the source. There's
(a) closure
(b) death
(c) erasure
(d) peace
(e) apocalypse

in here, and we must fight to get to it first.

From the Neural Transcript

Well, I guess this is goodbye. This is the last you'll hear of me. Or, to be more exact, this is the last you'll hear of me as me — me as I am right now. If ever you run into my outline and say hello, you'll be saying hello to someone whose internal organs correspond to someone other than the "me" as whom I currently identify. I always did long to be a donor. Maybe at long last my final wishes will be honored. That would make me very happy. Whatever "happy" means anymore.

U-N 7: Enter Password

For a moment Un-Na thought: "I've never noticed this place before."

When the moment had passed, she found herself in a fragrant humid world of petals and leaves and vines.

Then she remembered: "plush," "chromosome," "fugue," "reunify," "stereoscopic."

She had crossed the doorway.

She was inside the optical illusion.

Her first impulse was to walk toward the back of the shop. Did it exist? Once she started would she never stop walking? She attempted to follow as straight a line as possible. But before long the arrow had turned into something else, something infinitely less and infinitely more than one-dimensional. Each flower became a form of postponement, a space in which to dwell, and each space seemed to breed corridors and aisles and staircases that together formed a sentient living maze. She lost track of time. She lost track of her humanity.

U-N 8: Blink to Re-Enter

It resembled neither a mouth nor an ear nor an outstretched hand, yet those were the first three images (a woman's voluptu-

ous mouth; a feline ear nervously twitching; a child-sized hand outstretched) that the flower seemed to evoke in Un-Na's mind. The shade of each petal was oddly alive: the palest tint of "cinnabar" (not literally cinnabar) on the perpetual verge of "blue" (a blue that struck Un-Na less as color, more as blunt force pain). When Un-Na touched the bloom, at once the petals answered her by drinking her fingerprints. Soundlessly they drank and drank until one by one each fingertip had been sipped into a state of printlessness. When Un-Na leaned in more closely to breathe in the flower's tone, a sudden absence of emotion began to fill her heart. Slowly, like condensation, it came to her attention that somehow tears of nondescript emotion were traveling down the features of her face. (Later, much later, Un-Na learned that the flower was recollecting the tears of nondescript emotion for future use.) Once the tears had subsided, once the absence of emotion was complete, Un-Na realized that the flower was returning her own gaze. With unthinkable gravity and unthinkable care, the flower was staring from its core into the core of Un-Na's brain. Everything stayed this way for a very long while. Over the course of timelessness Un-Na and the flower turned into an exquisite corpse — awaiting the handmade coffin where finally it might rest in peace. Over the course of timelessness Un-Na and the flower turned into a still life — awaiting the handmade shadowbox where finally it might feel at home.

U-N 9: Is This You?

The subject line was blank. The size of the message was exactly 1K. When she opened the e-mail, she mouthed what she found: "Some characters may be displayed incorrectly. *Plush, chromosome, fugue, reunify, stereoscopic.* This message was generated automatically. Please do not reply."

Plush.
Chromosome.
Fugue
Reunify.
Stereoscopic.

No one else knew about that five-word sequence. (Not even X had known.) The phrase had become, over time, a kind of secret code with which Un-Na alone was familiar.

She included the original message in her reply. "Thank you for your message. What does it mean? Un-Na." She paused before typing again. "P.S. — I'm not sure why you instructed me not to reply. Perhaps this message will be returned to me. However, I don't believe this will happen. I believe my message will reach you." She stopped typing and clicked "send."

U-N 10: Exactly 1K

The flower was awake. It was sitting on the windowsill next to Un-Na's bed. Un-Na did not sleep. She touched the flower's stem with the fingertips of her right hand. The stem was vibrating extremely slightly, reminding Un-Na of a violin string that has been plucked gently many minutes ago. When she removed her fingers from the stem, every nerve in her arm was humming softly. "Something is happening to me," she told herself, but she was remembering telling herself those words rather than saying them for the first time.

She touched the flower again.

"This… is… a… mo… ment… in… space… and… time,"

Un-Na said, pronouncing each syllable as consciously as possible, and then suddenly time and space began to tilt, softly at first, then more and more steeply, until she couldn't tell if she was sitting up or lying down.

She imagined floating in a cloud of illuminated pollen. She imagined turning into a woman-shaped cloud of pollen. She imagined opening her eyes and staring at the ceiling. She imagined getting up, walking to the kitchen, and opening the refrigerator. She imagined drinking a glass of cold water. She imagined sliding the flower into her mouth and letting its petals explore the complicated surfaces and textures underneath her tongue. She imagined swallowing the flower. She imagined her fingers turning into ten different kinds of flowers. She imagined typing at her computer. She imagined the keyboard turning into a system

of roots. She imagined gently uprooting the flower, pulling the flower from the soil in the pot, tugging at it root by root, searching for something that had been buried for a long time, a time whose duration will not be measured.

X. Not the One Who
you uproot me and I hum the humming changes key from time to time the more my thread-like nerves exposed to air the more the humming begins to sound like a distinct melody when finally my roots are completely open you realize you are listening to the sound of a violin climb staircases up and up and up in endless ascent

wonderingly your fingertips trace my mysterious and deliquescent asymmetries there is something important you wish I could say to you I respond to the pressure of your feeling when you probe where my petals disappear into my core you find the depth of your touch replaced with condensation

like condensation it comes to your attention that without me your empathy your identity would remain untested and unverified and unauthenticated without me those tears would not be streaming down your face and you would not be convulsed with that strange hunger without me you would not have found the X of what you are

O. This mail could not be represented. Delivery agent — translation failed.
Dear U.

I'm not sure how this will end. It started when she left me. That was over ___ years ago, which means I've been working on this wretched sestina for over ___ years. God, has it only been ___? Maybe it was _____ years ago that she left me. I've been losing track. Maybe it was _____ years ago. Maybe I've been work-

ing on this wretched, no-good, rotten, miserable sestina for _____.

I keep having these dreams in which she keeps leaving me and I don't know why. What could have happened to her? I've tried everything: personals, obituaries, alien abduction reports… Each time, I get the same result: "Your search did not match any archives. Make sure all words are spelled correctly. Use different keywords." But by now I've already run out of all the different possible spellings. I've used up all the different keywords that could possibly exist.

Sometimes I imagine her living on the other side of the planet — continents away, half a day into the future. Or is it half a day into the past? Time zones have always confused me. I seem to get the numbers wrong no matter how diligently I twist the clock hands in my mind or travel mentally into an opposite sky. If only day = day and night = night… Maybe then I wouldn't feel so… so, I don't know, I guess so nostalgic all the time. So (frustratingly) out of place in space and time.

Wow. This e-mail is much longer than I thought it would be. I'm sorry. Well, I hope that I've answered your question. Take care and stay in touch.

All my best,
O.

P.S. About the "please do not reply" part of my message — just disregard it. I have no idea how that got there. Seriously, this e-mail account has a mind of its own. Sometimes it won't let me send my messages. Other times it will send a message to the wrong recipient. Other times it will send a message to the right recipient, but the message will have been altered somehow. For example, I don't remember writing "*Plush, chromosome, fugue, reunify, stereoscopic.*" There's just no way I could have written that message. I don't even know what "stereoscopic" means! What I'm trying to say, in other words, is that the real e-mail — the e-mail I actually wrote to you — is completely different from the e-mail you got.

Somehow I get the feeling that you don't believe me. Would you change your mind if I told you a secret? Would you believe me then?

Okay. Here is my secret.

I have this dream, this recurring dream, in which I've finally finished writing my sestina. In the dream, I'm holding the sestina in my hands. Well, actually it would be more precise to say that I'm holding a wrinkled piece of paper in my hands, and the sestina is printed on the wrinkled piece of paper. (I don't remember whether the paper became wrinkled before or after the sestina was printed on it.) In any case, here I am, I'm looking at each stanza, trying to read what I've written, but for some reason the words on the page are no longer legible to me. All the alphabet letters have been replaced by tiny diagrams — diagrams of empty cubes. Line after line, stanza after stanza, box after box, I see the same diagram of the same empty cube repeated over and over again. I mean, okay, yes, to be sure, the cubes are not exactly the same — there are slight variations in size and perspective, and most of the cubes are imperfectly shaped to a certain degree — but to me they look virtually identical. What was I thinking when I wrote this? I ask myself. What are these empty cubes supposed to mean? The more I stare at the page, the more elusive the poem grows. It's as if my pupils have been dilated and I can't see anything up close.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, she materializes before me. "It's you again," she says. But she isn't looking directly at me. She's looking at something hovering above my head. Instead of following her gaze, which would be the logical course of action, I attempt to give her my sestina. At this point she does make direct eye contact with me and POW!! I am stunned by the realization that there is something alien about her. She = alien! From new and ever-unfolding distances I hear her speak, so this is her speaking now:

"I've already read the sestina and it made me feel nothing. Listen to me. I am a different person. There was a telepathic flower and consequently my nerves were modified. That's why I couldn't feel your sestina. There is something you must help

me find before the verb stems are destroyed. If the voice-box is lost, if the deadline is passed, scientists in East K will invent a new type of loneliness. We cannot fail the empathy test. Are you listening to me? It… takes…… a…… real…… asteroid……"

Those last five words emerge from her lips more and more slowly, as if her voice is being decelerated by some unseen external force.

As I'm listening to her speak, my mind is struggling. I don't know her language. I don't know the language of empty cubes. How am I going to teach myself the language of empty cubes? And just when I start to panic, I happen to look down at my sestina. Now, what I'm about to tell you may sound incredible, but you have to believe me — I swear it's all true. Are you ready?

The diagrams — those empty cubes, remember? — are coming to life. Literally. All those cubes are mutating into insects — living, squirming insects. I can't even begin to tell you how weird it is. Stanza after stanza is teeming with these insects, until finally the sestina isn't a sestina anymore… Astonished, I wake up from the dream wondering why the bedroom door switched walls.

That's when it hits me. There is no such thing as a real asteroid. Do you know what asteroids are? They're debris left over from the formation of the solar system. Do you know how they shine? They shine by reflecting light. I am not lying to you. Go ahead, look it up. Look up the etymology, the roots of the word. An asteroid is something that has the appearance of a star. But it's not identical to a star. Do you see what I'm getting at here?

I can't be sure that my message — the message as I've written it, the message that I'm writing right now — will ever reach you. For all I know, the names of the characters will have been mixed up by the time you get this. For all I know, someone other than you is reading these words, and the words being read are no longer mine.

The R: Someone Crucial is Missing From this Message
* herein designated in the Concordance of Dreams as "*," whose asymmetrical shape is thought to be the outcome of one violent collision, from whose perspective the ** would never travel the same path again, whose relation to "**" can be expressed mathematically as "*/**," is hereby named in memory as

"Left over from the formation."

Enter your personal message here:

If you're X, then I must be Un-Na, the one you leave without explaining why, the one who is trying to make sense of your disappearance.

If you're Un-Na, then I must be O., who wants to confide in you but to whom you never write back.

If you're Oh, then I must be X, the shadowy figure in the audience watching you play a transparent woman who will stage anything to hurt me, anything to betray the depth of my feelings.

If you're the Teller, then I must be Un-Ha, the one whose name is slightly modified by your unintentionally hurtful miscalculation.

If you're the fragrant humid world of petals and leaves and vines, then I must be the telepathic flower you so willingly give away to a stranger who won't know what to do with me when I slide into the center of her mind.

If you're the flower, then I must be the one whose body they find the next morning with you blossoming from my open mouth .

Z: Identity Test

Not that Un-Jen was her real name. Her real name was difficult. Or so she had been told. But Un-Jen, it might as well have been her real name. Especially if you consider the fact that she was interchangeable. Not that she minded being interchangeable. The ability to be interchanged, whether by others or by her own self, was a special ability. A secret, subtle power. Interchangeability: a gift. And it's because of this gift that she has been saved. Saved from being the main character of this story. A story of which she wanted no part. A story of which she never wanted any part.

Enigma 4: Translate the following dialogue back into its original language.

"Yes, it has been a while."

"What have you been up to?"

"Not much… I've been trying to teach myself 한국어."

"What's 한국어?"

"Sorry, I should have explained myself. '한국어' is a Korean word that means 'Korean language.'"

"Oh, I see… So you're learning Korean. How has that been?"

"It's… interesting. I'm so accustomed to writing in sequences of alphabet letters… but 한글 doesn't work that way."

"What exactly is 한글? Is that the same as…"

"Almost. 한글 is the script for writing in Korean."

"I think I remember reading about it somewhere. Wasn't it invented by Korean scholars?"

"Yes, in the fifteenth century."

"So how does it work?"

"Well, the units are syllable blocks. You compose words and sentences by placing these syllable blocks next to one another…"

"I see. Hmmm. Why are you teaching yourself Korean?"

"It was my first language… I forgot it when I was a child."

"Then shouldn't you be able to learn it again quickly?"

"Yes, I hope so. It's probably still there in my brain… Actually, I'm quite sure it's still there. Sometimes I dream in Korean."

"What does that mean? Do all the people in your dream talk in Korean?"

"No, not exactly… It's hard to explain. There's this voice — a woman's voice. It's as if she's… narrating the dream while the dream unfolds. And the dream is unfolding in Korean."

"Is it always the same woman?"

"Yes, she's always the same woman… but she isn't anyone I know in real life. She certainly isn't me."

"What does she look like?"

"I'm not sure. She's never visible to me. I can hear her speak, but I can't see her or touch her… I don't even think she's human. She's more like… I don't know… a robot… or a cross between a robot and… a musical instrument — does that make any sense? Something about her voice… something about her voice brings to mind the sound of a violin. When I picture her… I imagine a statue made out of metal. And somewhere inside this metal statue, a violin is being played — by whom, I can't say."

"But is she communicating to you in words? Do you understand what she's saying?"

"While I'm dreaming, yes — everything she says is absolutely clear to me. It's as if we have some sort of… I don't know, some sort of telepathic connection that allows us to… that almost allows us to exist in near-unison with each other. It's as if our identities are… are constantly being synchronized, as if…we're constantly becoming almost the same person. But when I wake up the connection disappears. All I'm left with is this memory… this distant memory of a violin playing. No — not a memory, more like… tiny vibrations humming through my skin."

"Hmmm."

"But I stopped dreaming in Korean when I started relearning it."

"Really? When was the last time you dreamt in Korean?"

"I can't remember."

"Do you miss it? Hearing her voice, I mean."

"I don't know. Sometimes, I guess? But enough about me. I want to know how you've been."

……dmz……dmz…dmz……dmz……
dmz……dmz……dmz……..dmz……
dmz……..dmz……dmz……dmz……
…….dmz……dmz…dmz……
dmz……...…(**RE-UNIFICATION**)……
dmz……dmz……dmz……
dmz……dmz……dmz…dmz……

INTERLUDE

Verblessness

After George Herbert's "Prayer (I)"

엄마 the rosary of yarn and wire;
A vivid sunlit meter of lost sleep;
The brain in late November; gloom afire;
Misgiving that could make a camera weep;

Vivaldi, childhood, piano lesson years;
One safety pin, agape, its fang exposed;
Ten expectations failed; a schoolgirl's fears;
Four seasons that forever sound transposed;

Lipsticks, and coins, and thread, and pills expired;
A drawer in a bedroom rarely seen;
How much a single daughter weighs, attired;
Adhesive double-stick; the things we mean;

The password to my soul; divided blood;
A stunning riddle, half-misunderstood.

INTERLUDE

Generation Hwabyung Telepathy

On brittle paper: a poem long thought to be lost. The poem that killed my father's father as he was writing it. A poem about the son — my uncle — who starved to death during the war. The same war that left my father orphaned.

"Wan-young, my beloved son. Reality — once it has passed by — is just a dream. But a dream until I wake up is reality… If you miss me and your mom when you are in your eternal meditation in nirvana, can you visit us in our dream?"

Through a blur, I stare at the characters, Chinese mixed with Korean 한글, and I see rows of science-fictional creatures. Aliens. Mutations. Cyborgs. Granddaughters.

"Delete," I hear some part of me plead. But the pain of a grandfather larger than myth will never let me go.

(strum these lines of time)

Free Indirect Suicide: An Unfinished Fugue in H Minor

THEMES
How could she, how could she
— From "Thirteen examples of free indirect discourse in late Earth narratives, translated from the archaic postmodern," published in the year 3841

Please I don't understand it's the pain I love you so much I'm so sorry do not resuscitate please it's the pain
— From a suicide note written in 2012

For an English professor, she is very poorly able to articulate the "why now" for her suicidal gesture. […] *More surprising is her inability to give a linear history given that she is an English professor. She starts talking about her parents' parents when asked about why she is in the ER today.*
— From "Mental Status Exam Psych Resident MD Initial Evaluation Note," August 2016

One's suicide does not happen belong happen to oneself alone.
— Proverb heard in a dream

Suicide may not repeat itself. But it rhymes.
— Her afterlife

IMPERFECT
H is for Hangul
H is for Han
H is for Hwabyung
By which I'm undone

MULTIPLE CHOICES
A. "took own life"
B. "succumbed to terminal mental illness"
C. "killed self"
D. "ended own life"
E. "began new life"
F. "committed suicide"
G. "died by own hand"
H. I can't do this anymore
I. "logged off"
J. "surrendered"
K. "refused"
L. "landed in undiscovered country"
M. "lost battle"
N. "won war"
O. "finished game early"
P. "is waiting for you to catch up"
Q. "found secret melody"
R. "designed another way"
S. "still loves you so much"
T. "learned how to exist without living"
U. "joined the others"

V. "completed sculpture"
W. "remains all around you"
X. "transcends every paradox"
Y. "is now beyond any language we know"
Z. o.oooooooooooooooooooo

PRONOUNS
Sometimes I dream that you and my twenty-one-year-old self have merged and turned into a singular third person.

"Feel free," the third person says, "to delete this ghost."

SOCIAL MEDIA POST, June 2018
Content warning: Korea, suicide, life, separation, family, reality, flesh, pain, isolation, togetherness, all of it.

As a few of you know, I recently tried (again) to end my suffering on my own terms. Already the world is always a lot, but lately it seems to be getting much worse — especially as filtered through my rapidly cycling bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress (Stanford, etc.).

Before you judge me or even before you say "Thank goodness you survived!" or "Think of the mess you'd leave behind!": please let me offer several comments. Maybe they will seem obvious. Maybe they will be educational.

- The stigma surrounding mental illness and suicide in our culture only amplifies, compounds, and aggravates the illness and the pain. I know this from firsthand experience. As I was waiting silently to die in the darkness of my bedroom, I was screamingly aware of the stigma and the shame. I felt horrible for my family and all who are dear to me. I was not dying in peace. I was in agony — physical, spiritual, mental, all dimensions. Now that I am somewhat distanced from that

former self, I see not my self but a human being dying in a state of terrible pain, pain that is magnified by stigma. Nothing about that magnification seems right to me.

- Why did I try to end my suffering on my own terms? I struggle with suicidal ideation every day. Don't tell me to fight it. Already it is a fight. I feel it in my cells. Molecules. Physically and psychically. That ongoing struggle is the excruciating and excruciated filter through which, for example, I watched a rapist and a dictator win acclaim in Singapore, gasped in pain from another migraine, swallowed my personal feelings in order to accept South Korean hopefulness, continued to experience grueling almost blinding migraines, learned of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain, listened to the voices of families torn apart at the border, could not stop weeping, was reminded of Korean families being ripped apart at a border on the other side of the planet decades ago. Is this reality? Is it my fault? Did I help to make any of it happen? Sometimes my mood disorder and my trauma convince me that the most ethical response to all of it would be for me to terminate this body. The planet would heal a bit from the damage I am currently doing to it. All things considered I have had a decent life. Forty years is more than I ever imagined. For me to end it now would not be a tragedy — especially if there were no stigma.
- I want to be able to die in peace. I would feel so much better if I knew there were a safe and caring space where I could end my life while donating my healthy organs to those who need them.
- I never asked to be born. (But what if in truth I did? I wonder now if in some meta-life my meta-self requested to be born. "That sounds like an interesting experiment," she said. "See you on the other side." And what will she say when she "returns"?)

THE ELLIPTICAL OMISSION OF SUPERFLUOUS CHARACTERS

1. To unlock this poem ……
2. …… see other side for instructions.
3. In person this poem will never exist.
4. Locked safely in a glass box far away from sunlight, we are kept.
5. If this was you ……
6. We noticed a new sign-in to this poem.
7. Carefully tear …… along the perforated lines.
8. If this wasn't you, you don't need to do anything.
9. The key to composing a good password is …… characters.
10. In theory this poem cannot be translated into English.
11. By "theory" we mean "person."
12. To open this poem fold our side edges first.
13. Plot twist: ……!
14. ~~This is where the sonnet was supposed to end.~~
15. To see the other side for instructions, I opened this poem.
16. Aren't we constantly saving versions of ourselves and deleting others?
17. **Between the …… I wrote and the ……. we could have written, this poem is the difference.**
18. And sometimes we save the wrong selves.
19. The …… time you saw me in person was before I returned to my original form.
20. Due to
21. Due to excess
22. Due to an excess of violations, this
23. …… this poem
24. ~~unlocked~~
25. Due to an excess of
26. ……..this poem is now
27. Due to an excess of rule violations, this poem is now locked
28.

"IN MIXED STATE," DIARY ENTRY, OCTOBER 2018
According to the Mayo Clinic, my bipolar disorder is rapid cycling and "treatment-resistant."

Yet there's reason to be "cautiously optimistic": thyroid supplements, according to the chair of psychiatry at Mayo, may help alleviate my symptoms.

On the way back to NYC from Rochester, Minnesota, I was hit by a panic attack in the sky. There really are no exits from a plane while it's up in the air, are there? My brain was scrambled, and scrambling.

The nerves of my body are fighting their own climate change. Toxic spills of emotion, tsunamis of mood, rising levels of post-traumatic stress and bad memories. Hurricanes in my skull.

What can I do? I can try my best. I can try to be cautiously optimistic. I can hold on to moments that feel like happiness. I can. I will. I must.

I want a PhD in how to want, effortlessly, to be alive.

SOME OF WHAT I DON'T KNOW
Your name. (I'm too afraid to ask.)

The sound of your voice.

Exactly when you died.

Your last thought.

How your body was found.

Whether your family — my family — will ever forgive me for writing these words.

SOME OF WHAT I DO KNOW
Your death happened in Korea — Korea the homeland of my parents, Korea beyond unity and division, Korea whose DMZ I visit when I'm broken.

Your death happened in Korean — Korean my cradle language, Korean a language still foreign to me, Korean the language in which my parents are fluent, Korean the language I started losing (just as I started losing my eyesight) when the teacher instructed my parents to talk to me in English only, Korean a language my mother wielded like a long sharp object through my younger self, Korean a language that can bring me to my knees as if it were depression itself, Korean the language in which the terrible ideation speaks to me.

You died in the 1980s. You died when my mother was many years younger than I am today. You died when I was in elementary school. (You died just as I started wearing eyeglasses.)

I cannot stop myself from writing about you.

I cannot stop myself from dreaming about you.

I was the only other person in the room when my mother picked up the phone and learned that you were dead. Hearing my mother's scream — but it was not a scream; it was worse than a scream; it pierced and froze my prepubescent marrow — is one of my earliest memories.

You were a mother also;

EXCERPT FROM MEDICAL RECORDS, AUGUST 2016
Orientation: Person Place Time. Yes Yes Yes.
Eye contact: Avoidant.
Behavior: Evasive.
Affect: Flat.

Mood: Depressed.
Thought Process: Goal Directed.
Thought Content: Suicidal.

LULLABY
My mother never talked about your life.
My mother never talked about your death.
Yet every time my mother raised her voice
Your silence whispered through me like a breath.

My mother never talked about your death.
My mother never talked about your life.
Yet every time my mother laid a hand
Your absence bled my body like a knife.

US
You were my mother's beloved sister, her dear friend.

You were my aunt.

Sometimes, when I am consumed by the Korean fire-illness, by hwabyung, you become the sister I never had.

CLIP
"— cation," she said while watching intricately patterned fish materialize against the backdrop of shut eyelids. She had taken xx milligrams of xxxxxx just over an hour ago. She was lying on her back on the floor of her living room. The phone, a smartphone, was lying on her stomach. It was hot outside. It was July. It was the fourth of July, her rapist's favorite holiday. Her rapist had died years ago — in 2007. Her rapist was a well-known scholar who had written a book. It was an important book. Everyone said so. Didn't they? They did.

"What did you say?" her brother asked. Abruptly the sound of his voice made the intricately patterned fish vanish and replaced them with a fresh image: a rectangle, a shimmering diagram, rotating in space, perpendicular lines brought vividly to life.

What did she say.

She tried to recall what she had said before the memory of her rapist had intruded into her mind. As memory struggled, her body became a woman-shaped lake of ambiguous feelings: numbness, anger, hope, self-loathing, generosity, anguish, forgiveness, despair.

And then she remembered: love. She had been struggling to tell her beloved brother that she loved him. And she knew that if she sounded too sentimental, he would be alarmed. He would worry that she was saying goodbye. And then he would call 911. And her life might be saved. And she could not let her life be saved. Thus, she could not say "I love you." But she wanted him to know that she did love him. Dearly. So dearly.

"I miss," she said, with effort, tears converging in her eyes, "our location."

"Are you okay?" her brother said.

"I'm sorry. I meant." She tried to think clearly but could not. "Education," she said, but that was not quite right. "Vocation? Medication. Vacation. Dislocation. Echolocation."

"Shit," her brother said. "Shit. Is this about Stanford? Shit. Should I be worried? Shit."

"No. Please." Tears were already streaming from the outer corners of her eyes, which were still shut, into her hair. The luminous rectangles were mutating into hills of calm green velvet moss. "Let me stay here. In the garden. Where we are safe."

"Jennie? Hold on. Okay? Just, please, hold on."

"I'm fine, I'm fine," she said, crying.

"Hold on. I'm getting help. Jennie? Please just hold on."

PRONOUNS, AGAIN
We dream that I and you have merged and turned into a singular third person.

"Do not," the third person says. "Do not delete this ghost."

UNRELIABLE NARRATIVE, WINTER 2015
This is her island. A small place where the dune meets the sea. A place that belongs to her alone. Here I am not even a guest. (Here I am not even a ghost.) My sense of being in this world cannot be documented, just as her existence in my reality has never been acknowledged. Not fully. Not officially. Not as a matter of record or fact.

How often have I visited? I've lost track. Anniversaries are hard. Reunions are hard. The timing is tricky. The fog of it… Not easy to endure. One of us survived. The other one will never need to understand the new millennium. She baffles the passage of time. Those incisions may look fresh, yet they neither bleed nor show signs of healing. Her hair is longer than she is tall (our heights are almost identical) yet her skin is more translucent than opaque.

(The veins of her soul. They remind me of the constellation of beads that I forgot to bring.)

Piecemeal and imperfectly, I feed her updates. I share with her the latest news and half-truths.

"Mom and I are closer now," I tell her. "Weird, huh? Last year, that's when things got better. Funny story: We were arguing on the phone — I'm not sure why… And suddenly she demanded… she said I had to ask her to forgive me, for being born. I had to say '죄송합니다' about a million times. I begged and begged, and finally I think I was forgiven."

She doesn't laugh. A mist is gathering. It's cold. The mist on this island makes me want to paint a bright red bridge. Instead, I am shivering.

"Um, what else. Mom says you would have looked like Moon Chae-won. I had to google the name. Not that you know what 'google' means… Anyway, she's a star. She's a Korean star. Beautiful. Younger than we…"

My voice freezes. I realize I'm wrong. One of us is actually younger than Moon Chae-won. One of us will never truly grow old. She'll never have to manage a dizzying regimen of pills, pills to automate the neurons… She no longer has promises to keep, or miles to go before she sleeps.

"… Dad and Patrick, they're okay," I say after I've regained my composure. "And Calvin, well, he has health issues." I take a deep breath. "He's old, for a dog. I wish you'd met him. He would love you. Maybe, after he's gone, he'll… end up here. Then you'll get to know what it's like…" (Why am I doing this? This is evil.) "… to play with a puppy. That's something you never…"

The shaking has resumed. I can't help it. It's puppetry. It's cruel, and it's stupid, and I hate it. (The surge of emotion.)

I hate that I was too early. That they were nearly just in time. That they were sooner than late. That she escaped.

I hate that after all these years we still can't figure out what to call her, or how to deal with the secret of her body.

I hate myself. For envying (instead of…). For wishing she could feel what I've felt. For saying what I'm about to say.

"Survival of the fittest — b'b'b'bullshit." I'm ugly now, something to laugh at and disdain, but I'm relentless. "Fuck you. Fuck you! You were stronger than I was. More determined. We were supposed to switch places. You left me behind. You left me stranded."

No response. She might as well be wearing headphones. Far away in the mist, lost in thought, dancing. She might as well be deaf, or blind, or both. She might not be here at all.

So I keep throwing words at her. About innocence. About luck, about how she's lucky, she has no idea how lucky. She's lucky the ___ didn't happen to her, she's lucky she doesn't have nightmares about ___, she's lucky she doesn't have to cope with ___. And even, EVEN if all of that had happened to her, she would have known how to go on. How to "thrive." How to "count her blessings." I accuse her of being the one Dad and Mom and Patrick and Calvin deserve. Someone "brave." Someone "resilient." Someone truly alive. Someone happy.

I tell her how much it hurts, listening to the stories I hear about her. "So cheerful and outgoing… Independent… Full of life…" What hurts most is that no amount of disbelief can kill the memories — the disease of them being true.

Mist turns to rain. It dawns on me that everything is the same color: the rain, the dune, the sea, her hair, her wounds, the veins of her soul, everything. Illusion is breaking. The sound of my own voice must have woken me up.

"… Let me back," I hear myself say out loud in my bedroom, which is cold and gray in the dim January air. I'm so sick of crying. But I remember the way she went and the images wrench

and I am sitting up now with my body folded and I am shaking with my arms wrapped around my knees.

"Please I'm sorry please I'm so sorry I'm sorry you were in so much pain. Forgive me for not dying forgive me for not living. Forgive me for being here like this. Teach me, how. How to be alive. I will be better. I want to be better. For you. For both of us. For us all."

DIALOGUE, SUMMER 1999
(Days after I was discharged from Yale New Haven Hospital following my first attempt.)

- My mother: Did you tell anyone about my sister.
- My mother's only daughter (hesitating): Yes.
- My mother (quietly furious): Why.
- My mother's only daughter (anxious): The doctors asked me if anyone in my family…
- My mother (her voice unreadable): You didn't have to answer.

DEDICATION

You may never read these words, but I must dedicate them to you.

M'Omoni, Omma, Mom, Mommy.

Mom.

My only mother. Whom I love so much my lungs and brain and spine and kidneys and spleen and intestines hurt thinking about you.

~~I'm sorry I was never beautiful enough to be your daughter.~~

May you never read these words.

But may you know.

EXCERPT FROM MENTAL STATUS EXAM/PSYCH RESIDENT MD INITIAL EVALUATION NOTE, AUGUST 2016, NEW YORK CITY

- Appearance: Asian woman appearing stated age, in hospital scrubs, wearing prescription sunglasses, sitting with legs intertwined
- Attitude/Behavior: Provocative, providing information and often saying "Do I have to be honest with you"
- Speech: Audible, spontaneous
- Mood: Irritable, depressed
- Affect: Mood congruent, nonlabile
- Thought process: Circumstantial
- Thought Content: Endorses SI
- Perception: Denies current AVH
- Insight/judgment: Fair to impaired

Time Seen by Me (Military Time): 01-Aug-2016 16:14

Psychiatric Evaluation:

Chief Complaint: "I'm here against my will; I want to end my life on my own terms."

History of Presenting Illness: thirty-eight-year-old Korean woman, working as a literature professor, domiciled alone, not currently in a relationship, w/ past psych d/o BPAD, panic attacks, GAD, PTSD, fibromyalgia w/ one prior SA at age twenty-one (xxxx xxxxxx and took xxxxxxx), SIB of reported xxxxxxxx self with xxxxxx.

Patient states that she has had chronic suicidal motivation and asks whether we can "cure suicidality."

She says she started feeling suicidal in college and again in 2012 when there was a flood of some kind that resulted in her becoming "an agoraphobe." She notes that within the past few months

she has been more unstable, unable to engage in work and social relationships at prior level of functioning.

Pt acknowledges that many times in college she would stay up for many nights in a row and appeared to endorse delusional thoughts of "battling the stars in the sky at night" which patient acknowledged was askew to reality.

She cites a European nation that permits suicide for the mentally ill.

Pt states "The world would be better if I were extinguished." She says that no psychiatrist will engage with her "philosophically" but that she is just taking up resources and has "healthy organs" and is an organ donor and the world would be better off without her — it would be "like a scar healing."

She says she has no spouse or kids.

Her thought process is circumstantial and she seems to be preoccupied with Korea and rape and Stanford and how that has complicated her life, as well as that it is unworthy for her to live.

For an English professor, she is very poorly able to articulate the "why now" for her suicidal gesture. She was also telling me an odd and long-winded story about Buffy the Vampire Slayer. More surprising is her inability to give a linear history given that she is an English professor. She starts talking about her parents' parents when asked about why she is in the ER today.

While she does not appear floridly manic, she could have a more irritable mania. Patient also might have BPD, given apparent SIB and impulsivity, unstable self image, and emotional dysregulation — although depression or hypomania could be superimposed. Patient also has a family history of suicide in ad-

dition to a remote attempt. Thus, she remains at risk of suicide but this needs to be investigated more thoroughly.

Plan: Admit.

Past psychiatric history: First contact after SA in college right after turning twenty-one, when also hospitalized.

Family psychiatric history: Patient's aunt committed suicide.

CONSCIENCE
- My father: Jennie, please? Please do not write about your aunt's death.
- Self: But writing has been therapeutic for me. Cathartic.
- My father: But what about your cousins? What about Mom? What if they read your writing? How will they feel?
- Self:

DELINEATION (2019)
During my hospitalization in August of 2016, a team of doctors at New York-Presbyterian Weill Cornell asked me to tell them my story. Why was I there?

In retrospect I know I should have answered their routine questions by stating simply: I was there because my psychiatrist believed I needed to be hospitalized.

At the time, however, what blazed in my mind — what I needed to communicate most urgently — was the following message:

There is a line. This line explains why I must die.

This line is rarely legible, wildly cursive, often ghostly, and occasionally elliptical. It lives in the present tense.

It emerges like calligraphy from the ash-and-blood inkwell of the Korean War — the war during which my mother is born; the war that leaves my father orphaned.

It scrawls its way through decades encompassing precarity, immigration, mental illness, homesickness, my father's mythic work ethic, my mother's ethereal paintings, the strange arrangement of their marriage, and in 1978 the birth of an existence — mine — to which I do not consent.

Emphatically the line draws itself into a bright circle around the moment my cradle language begins to starve: When I am a young child, a well-intentioned teacher tells my parents to stop speaking to me in Korean if they want me to succeed in America. They must speak to me in English only, no matter how broken.

My Korean mother and I are thereafter divided by the English language. During the first half of my life, we are at war with each other over how a Korean daughter ought to appear and behave. During the second half of my life, the battleground evolves into a heavenly scenic demilitarized zone that neither of us can visit except in our dreams.

Follow the line to this fact: Since my parents speak to each other solely in Korean — every other word is like the slamming of a door — I do not comprehend the language of intimacy. Marriage is almost literally and certainly figuratively an alien language. Even today the idea of intimacy is to me violently counterintuitive.

The line ties me to my father's father who is a literature teacher and who dies from writing an elegy for his eldest son shortly after the Korean War.

It draws a connection between my mother's extreme Roman Catholicism and the unspeakable aftermath of the suicide of my mother's beloved sister.

It adds figurative meaning to my literal indebtedness to the IMF (the International Monetary Fund), where for over two decades my father is employed as an economist, where my brother and I complete math assignments in our father's office while he works over weekends, where my father will learn to raise his children as "developing countries," and against which friends over the course of my life protest for reasons that I understand both too well and not well enough.

It underlines one of the last significant events of my life before I move from Northern Virginia to college in New Haven: Inside a confessional booth in McLean, a priest says God cannot forgive me for being attracted to other females or for doubting His existence. However, the priest offers to give me holy water to keep next to my bed. In that way I can be protected from Satan.

By now the line and my consciousness are virtually indistinguishable. It is the concertina wire glinting through the circumstances of my adulthood: wrestling with bright celestial objects (which is how it feels to write essays on Kant and Hume at 2 a.m. while hypomanic), being handled like a doll or statue by my first dissertation adviser (a man who passionately collects early American artifacts), my struggle to forget the devastating fact that my first dissertation adviser sexually harassed and raped my twenty-two-year-old self, years of denial and trauma, compulsive self-hammering each time I need to "pleasure" myself, multiple attempts at suicide (logging off, resigning, giving up), experimental attempts at healing such as transcranial magnetic stimulation, my renaming from "Jennie" to "Seo-Young," a fascination with the ecological sanctuary of the Korean DMZ, Emily Dickinson, a fraught relationship with North Korea (the reluctant subject of my second monograph), culture-bound syndromes such as postmemory han, a telepathic connection with

my Korean American beagle nephew (himself afflicted with postmemory han), the precision with which I perceive when I shut my eyes (phosphorescent landscapes and rhetorical edifices that I "close trip" as if close reading a poem), discovering that at forty-one years old I (a queer agnostic spinster) have become the embodiment of my childhood phobias, the ongoing and haunting sense that reality is not real, the desire to be a stainless steel robot, the fantasy of prying open the secret of North Korea at the base of volcanic Mount Paektu, and a conviction that I have the right to end my life on my own terms.

I must have said it aloud numerous times. "I have the right to end my life on my own terms."

My brain is terminally ill, I told the doctors. My mind is in excruciating pain. I am ready for my brain to die. Meanwhile my other organs are healthy. Give my organs to those who need them. It is the logical thing to do. I never consented to existence in the first place.

Let me go. Cut the line. All it is doing now is barely holding my parts together like hideous stitching, like this very sentence, and suspending the sorry thing that is less than the sum of my parts from the hands of a heinous puppeteer I hope I never meet. Burn my remains.

Years later, reading the psychiatrists' notes, I could not help but feel bemused by their assessment. Patient's thoughts are circumstantial, tangential, digressive. Delusional? (Patient is a professor!?) Patient does not understand what is medically relevant. Patient goes so far as to mention Korean War.

"Of course I had to mention the Korean War!" I exclaimed to the medical file in my hand.

The truth is that my desire to die (one that seems to have postponed itself for now) is more than a medical phenomenon. Yes,

I am bipolar, but there are other factors that characterize my struggle with suicidal ideation — among them Roman Catholicism, the English language, the English poetry I was taught to read closely, the Korean poetry I was never taught to read, the poetry I now teach to my students at Queens College CUNY, North Korea, Northern Virginia, Northern California, the Stanford professor who abused his power by turning my younger self into an antique object, science fiction, Asian American literature, postmemory han, my inability even today to accept fully that my body and mind are worthy of recovery, and the fact that Seo-Young misses Jennie.

Seo-Young misses Jennie.

And both Seo-Young and Jennie miss the mother whose sister never ended her own life.

LANGUAGE
When I was little, my mom and I were fluent in the same

SONG LYRICS
(1)
"Here in America I'm dumb":
just one of many accusations,
one of many spears aimed at
her only daughter, aimed at me,
before she left America
forever, left for home, her home,
in Seoul, where I — she says — am "dumb."

A dozen planets later I
can't help but wonder if she knew
her aim was genius — poison — clear.
That spear, it hit my ear and found
the center of my brain. It grew

a tangle of hwabyung so dense
I could not learn again Korean.

(2)
엄마 × 4
엄마 × 4
엄마 × 4
엄마 × 4

THE DAUGHTER MY MOTHER MADE UP: A BLASON
foundation (sand beige)
+ concealer (flawlessly awake)
+ contact lenses (because eyeglasses are forbidden)
+ eyebrows (taupe/charcoal)
+ lipstick (peony cinnamon brick)
+ hair (thick, black, long but not too long)
+ ideal weight (between 100 and 110 pounds)
+ education (Yale Stanford Harvard)
———————————————————————
= the square root of a negative daughter
= *an imaginary daughter*

DIAL
~~Between your side of Earth and mine~~
~~the difference equals midnight~~
~~minus noon, a straight line turning~~
~~to the opposite of evening.~~

In country code *plus eighty-two*
I make a daughter up for you.

DUE DATE, 2015
– Friend: Don't you have a biological clock? I want to be a mom as soon as possible.

- Self (matter-of-fact): I don't think I want kids, but I do feel the pressure of some kind of biological clock. I feel — I feel this pressure, this odd pressure. This pressure to end my life.
- Friend: Stop!
- Self (apologetic): Don't worry! I'm fine. It's just — (Pause) this feeling of pressure in the cells of my body. It feels — It feels like the pressure of a deadline. (Pause) The deadline for giving birth to my death. (Pause) Sorry. I'm just being honest. (Pause) I imagine it's not unlike your biological clock.
- Friend: Well, I hope you never give birth.
- Self (laughing, earnest, without any bitterness): Aw. Thanks. And I hope you have a wonderful family. I know you will.

DIARY ENTRY, NOVEMBER 2014
Dream last night: I meet the ghost of my mother's sister, the one who killed herself back when I was too young to understand what was happening but old enough to understand that something was horribly wrong.

In real life I never met my aunt, but I was physically there when the news arrived. It was mid-afternoon somewhere in Northern Virginia. The phone rang. My mother answered. She uttered a cheerful greeting in Korean — it reminded me of a bird uttering a lovely chirp. And then, suddenly, she began to make a sound I can't begin to describe.

For days, for weeks, for months after the phone call, my mother herself disappeared — not to Korea, but to a bathroom in our old house. (It was too expensive for us back then to attend a funeral on the other side of the planet.) All the bath towels vanished into the place with the locked door where my mother grieved. Sometimes I could hear my mother shrieking.

Years later, after I asked one of my older cousins what had happened to that particular aunt, and after my cousin explained that my mother's dearest sister (they had been close friends) had

committed suicide, and after my mother discovered that I had asked this unforgivable question (to this day I blame myself for having been curious) — after that sequence of events, my mother refused to speak to me for a long time (almost a year), and for a long time I was terrified of her fury. My mother became beyond human: pure, implacable, abstract, impossible to reach.

(What I did not know, what I wish I had known, were the depths of her sorrow and how utterly stranded she felt: far from her home land and increasingly disconnected from her eccentric daughter.)

In the dream from last night, the ghostly meeting happens out of nowhere and for no apparent reason. My mother's sister is made out of diaphanous flesh. Her face is obscured by a veil. At some point the thought occurs to me that she and I might be the same age, and I start to shiver. "Pray for me," my mother's sister says, "and I will pray for you." When I begin to protest gently by saying "I'm agnostic now; I no longer believe," my aunt murmurs: "You are diaphanous too. We are like twins." And only then do I notice that I myself am wearing a veil.

… I woke up to the feeling of my body shaking and tears already in my eyes. Since then, I haven't been able to stop myself from sobbing into towels. I don't know for whom I am praying or to whom I am praying or whether I am praying at all, but the phrase "Pray for me" haunts me and I am stupidly inconsolable. If ever my Catholic mother reads these words, I hope that she will be merciful.

THERAPY NOTES

Here is what the doctor speculates. My mother's powerlessness to speak to my younger self in our native language — *English only,* the teacher insisted — likely turned me into a pathological empath, constantly struggling to read my mother's mind. And

because I am the kind of empath who travels uncontrollably through time, I am

three years old again, three, also four, and five, and I don't understand, omma, what's wrong? I love you so much, why won't you talk to me, I'm trying to read your mind, omma why do you cry, you used to be happy, I love you please say something please

(all of this in Korean, which we are not allowed to speak anymore, Korean the language that my much older self will attempt to relearn) and

I am coming back from traveling through time. And I am shaken. Because my mother has just thrashed me again.

APORIA
To be.
Not to be.
To

SILENT BIRD
Around the time when my mother stopped speaking to me, my father bought a canary for the family to love and enjoy.

The canary, who never sang, had feathers the color of a school bus. Even now when I see a school bus I think about the dejected canary. For some reason it spent most of the time leaning against the bars of the birdcage. No amount of coaxing or food seemed capable of cheering up our bird.

One night I woke up to the sound of my mother exclaiming in Korean. She was standing next to the birdcage. She had found the canary's lifeless body.

I remember my first thought: Did the canary commit suicide?

There was a time when I could not think about the canary without weeping. I am grateful that right now, today, on January 14, 2025, I can think about the canary and not feel annihilated.

DEDICATION
Dad
Appa
Who dove into the abyss itself to rescue his daughter from its depths
Who again and again found his daughter still alive almost
Who brought his daughter back to life
Who never gave up
Who has never given up

FAMILY THERAPY
Dr. K: Sir, could you elaborate on your mother's death? Was she ill?

My Dad (reluctantly): Oh —, no, she just. She — (breathing carefully) She drowned.

Dr. K: Was it a suicide?

My Dad (evasively): Oh, there was just a well. In Korea. Where we lived. After the war. After my sister went missing in the North. After my brother and my father died. And one day my mother. Was found. In the well. She. Drowned. (Pause; long sigh.) I don't know. If it was. Accidental. Probably she. (My father starts to nod his head absently.) She.

Dr. K: Seo-Young. You're crying.

Self (struggling not to mutate into a raging inter-dimensional mournful post-memory hwabyung goblin on steroids): Of. — Course. — I'm. — Crying — . (Pause; struggling not to

summon lightning, thunder, hail. Struggling to stay within linear time. Failing.) My mother's sister. — My aunt. — She completed a suicide when I was a little kid. I was there when the phone rang and my mother got the news. Have you ever heard a shriek of pure helplessness unleashed from the lungs of someone who is suddenly no longer human?

Dr. K: Not exactly, but

Self: Silence. My mother stopped speaking to me for months after I asked about what happened. Apparently I angered her by reminding her of her sister's death. So she stopped speaking to me. But she didn't stop hitting me. She didn't stop battering me in front of my little brother.

My dad (long, painful sigh): I was at work. I had no idea.

Self: Later she was even angrier at me. She trashed my bedroom. Literally there was broken glass on the floor. Bookshelves: eviscerated. Why? Because I became an English major. Because English is the language that tore us apart.

My Dad: Jennie. I'm sure Mom is proud of you, Jennie. Jennie, Mom loves you very much.

Self: Hold on. The crazy woman in the room is still talking. (I point at my dad.) This one here. This orphan. This living miracle of history. How many tragedies has he endured? And yet somehow he thrives! In what universe am I actually related to him? Dr. K., did you know. My father's own father — my grandfather! — died of being Korean. He died of han and hwabyung. Apparently when he watched his eldest son starve to death an evil force crushed his lungs and brain. That's how grandpa died. And as we all heard just minutes ago, my father's mother probably drowned herself in a well! And doctors wonder why I'm suicidal!

Dr. K: Here, Seo-Young, here are some tissues.

Self: Oh, I'm just getting started. You think this is me crying? No. This is rainbows and sunshine and unicorn puppies compared to the crying that happens when I'm at home. Have you ever seen an entire body weep?

Flesh, chromosomes, hair, feet, marrow, intestines, ovaries, knees, uterus, ruptured discs, orifices that have been gleefully violated by two different rapists, a heart sick of beating, sinuses, bones, liver, ears, nerves that are simultaneously numb and screaming in pain, kidneys, brain, teeth, gums, epidermis, trachea, spleen, too much memory! everything! — and yet Western medicine tells me that I am more or less perfectly healthy. My cysts are all benign, the soft tissue masses benign, edemas nothing to worry about, fibromyalgia a mere nuisance, thyroid vision stress hormones white blood cells herniated discs etcetera just slightly "abnormal" but nothing "serious" —

My Dad: This is all good, Jennie.

Self (furious; irrational; channeling dangerous energy): Then why do I feel like I'm dying, literally dying. And Dad why aren't you crying. Your mother drowned herself in a well! Listen to that sentence!

Dr. K: I have something to say.

[LATER, in my apartment]

Self: I'm sorry, Dad. I lost control in there. I'm so sorry.

Dad: No, Jennie, I'm so sorry.

Self: I realize there's also a lot of good in our lives. Not just trauma. [Pause] Dad, when you won the dissertation prize in economics at Columbia, did anyone congratulate you?

Dad (subdued, matter-of-fact): Oh, not really. My parents, as you know, were no longer alive. And when I received the letter about the prize, I was already living in DC. It was not a big deal. Mostly I was so relieved to have survived Columbia. I had not attended good schools before Columbia, and I was poor, so I was focused on survival.

Self: Dad, winning that prize is a big deal. Congratulations. Congratulations, Dad. I am so proud of you. Congratulations.

Dad (starting to cry)

DIARY ENTRY, DECEMBER 2018
During my latest hospitalization, I had a lot of time to think. One realization: my suicidal ideation may be a figure of speech for negative emotions I experienced after my mother's sister committed suicide.

When the phone rang and my mother heard the news, I was the only other person in the room. I was also a young child. I remember my omma made a sound worse than screaming. And then she was never the same. She became different forever.

(That "scream" — it has rhymed and resonated through decades.)

Years later my mother found a way to blame me for her sister's death. I don't blame her. I was an alien daughter, unforgivably American and grotesquely female. It — the "it" of the suicide and its unspeakability — it was never resolved. Even today she and I don't really talk. There's a DMZ between us.

Between my mother and my self
My father is the DMZ —
The zone that buffers

Her from me.

Maybe when I feel "suicidal" I am actually feeling a powerful desire to stop the bad feelings surrounding my aunt's suicide.

FREE INDIRECT _____
It is distributed unevenly across time, space, individuals, and communities.

It is a vivid thread erupting there or here in a beige-yellow fabric.

It is a rogue melody suddenly asserting itself in a contrapuntal fugue.

It is the turmoil of ideation slipping in and out of the minds of individual characters in a story narrated in the free indirect style.

She/he/they/it felt — she/he/they/it knew — yet how could she/he/they/it know? — that she/he/they/it had no other choice.

Time. Time to let go.

WILL
And if somehow I lose myself,
Don't judge. Please just feel better.
And if somehow I meet my aunt
I'll tell her that we love her.

DREAM
I wander through an empty museum. Suddenly a bright light appears at the end of a long corridor. As I approach the light, I see something that freezes my nerves and stops my heart:

The spear that replaced my mother's voice when she learned that her sister had killed herself.

Blazing without temperature, it hovers and revolves inside a transparent glass box.

Should I keep walking toward the spear?

Hold me, the spear says in my mother's voice.

Slowly I walk toward it.

TRANSLATED FROM KOREAN HWABYUNG
How could she —

Mercilessly sunlit memories streamed through her brain. The sound of her laughter. The jokes they shared. The gossip, the closeness.

Slowly her face crushed itself against a towel. She was sitting on the floor, legs folded before her, knees close to her chest. The towel was dense with tears. She had locked herself in the bathroom upstairs. It was the only place where she knew how to be.

How could she?

Downstairs, her son and daughter were probably doing homework. Her daughter had witnessed her at her most _____ — What must her daughter think of her. She did not care. She could not care. Her husband would be home soon.

She did not know how to care. She had not yet prepared supper. She was incapable of caring. She was too — too elsewhere to care.

How could she.

God, my God. Weeping, she wept. Suddenly she screamed! Some part of her was terrified by the sound. That part of her was buried deep inside a place now locked forever.

She did not notice, or did she, that her daughter was knocking on the bathroom door. Mom? Omma? Mommy? Where are you? She did not notice. She was somewhere else.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, she prayed, blind with loss. The words spilled from her like tears.

Now and at the hour of our death.
Now and at the hour of our death.
Now and at the hour of our death.

SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE
988

EPILOGUE
To be

INTERLUDE

Emergency Response (2018 Hospitalization)

Ms. Chu, this is an important question. Who is the current president of the United States?

My brain was telling me urgently
Not in words but in violent vehement feelings
That this was it, it was time for me to go,
And there was a woman lying there on the floor
Having a ——— — then (a chunk of time) —
And there was another woman half-standing up
Calling her brother, – (and there was I not I,)
And perhaps She was having a _____, left half of body
Numb or Paralyzed or numb, and the phone rang
And it was my brother, because (a chunk of time) –
and my phone rang on a tv show (What kind of building
Is this Ms. Chu?) Where my apartment was replaced
entirely with Simulation, bare walls, hospital
empty space, and the sound
of someone breathing,
She was still breathing,

then (chunk of time)
And I was not (this name)
not only (that name)
Vomiting chunks of missing time
I was

No more I
No more time

Between selves — stuck perpetually —
Between selves
In terrifying
empty space
Walls pounding
Walls pounding

We don't know if I
am Jennie
(Who is Korean)
or Seo-Young
(Who asks when
was that one here)
Or if I (I?)
I am the professor

What is the stress what is the stress
Ms. Chu what name
Does she respond to

Nothing no pronoun
The ocean beneath pronouns
The alien ocean

You don't know me yet I don't know myself

Am I alive? Yes you are alive
Am I alive? Yes you are alive

I am the president
She is the president
You are the president
These are the truths
Self-evident

[Breathe]

[Keep breathing]

[Sound of air]

[In out]

[In]

[Out]

INTERLUDE

M'어머니

1. I dreamt that it was 1951 and I was pregnant. I was pregnant with my mom. There was war all around us, Korean War, and we were running. Running from the chaos. Dear Mom, I know this is just a dream but for now we are together and I love you. I love you. Don't worry, Mom, I'll keep you safe. I'll carry you forever. I promise. I love you so much. I promise I'll keep you safe inside of me forever.

2. [Image description of an image that nobody can see: A photograph shows an open book. The writing is illegible. The words, if words they can be called, are written in luminous blood.]

3. I wake up in a strange motel room. My mother is standing at the window, her beautiful face lit by the sight that is holding her attention. No one else is in the room.

"Mom? Where are we?"

"Come here and see," she says.

I walk to the window. At first I think I'm looking at moonlight illuminating a vast wilderness of alien trees. Then I realize that

each tree is a tree-sized neuron. Some neurons glow, dendrites flickering. But most of the nerves seem dead.

"What happened to them?" I ask.

"Don't worry," my mother says. "They were neurovegetative. They wanted to be trees. Soon the lightning will make them even more powerful. Let's go outside. It's time."

This page is starting to wake up.

A Refuge for Jae-in Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major

INVOCATION (FEBRUARY 2016)
It's evening in Queens, New York. Alone in my apartment, I'm grading student papers and drinking ginger tea. The phone rings. For some reason I forget to check the caller ID before answering, "Hello?"

A woman's voice: "Hi, Seo-Young?"

"Yes?"

"I'm calling from Stanford to ask about your experience while you were here."

The blank space above: a representation of my immediate response to the caller's words.

I almost can't believe that this is happening. Stanford is reaching out to me. Will Stanford apologize at last? That is all I have ever wanted: an apology.

My experience while I was at Stanford.

The story tumbles out. It's a story I have told numerous times already — to psychiatrists, to close friends, to myself, to lovers, to neurologists, to therapists. The story begins with my suicide attempt at age 21 and ends with Stanford's own punishment of the professor in 2001: two years of suspension without pay. I describe the long horrible months of sexual harassment. I describe the rape — or the parts of it that I can bear to mention out loud. I add that I never pressed charges or received any money from either Stanford or the professor. All I did was tell someone else who told someone else who started the fact-finding investigation that resulted in his punishment. I have never sued the rapist, the department, or the school — despite the time I've lost and the fortune I've spent as a consequence of the harmful culture at Stanford that enabled the professor to injure me as well as others.

The monologue is disjointed and long. I hadn't been expecting this call. I haven't had time to prepare. (And yet I've had too much time to prepare: sixteen years.)

There is a silence after I've finished speaking. I start to wonder if perhaps the caller has hung up on me. I start to worry she won't call back.

But she's still there. "That's… awful," the woman is suddenly saying. "I'm so sorry. I'm just a Stanford undergrad. I was actually calling Stanford alumni for financial donations, to ask you for a gift of, but, I don't, I mean, in this case, for you…"

Something is happening to my eyes. The room has begun at once to darken and to seem much too bright. Or is something happening to my mind? Bright like sunlight at noon in northern California on a cloudless day. But I am in Queens, New York City. The year is not 2000. What time is it? How old am I? Something is happening to reality. A sickening gust spreads throughout my internal organs. The phone I hold is shaking. My hands and arms are shaking. I close my eyes. I imagine feathery bandages made of photons holding together the jigsaw of my body. The shaking subsides.

"No, I'm the one who's sorry," I manage to say, and I mean it. "Tell me about your studies."

"Sure," she says, and begins to talk with cheerful confidence about her major, which is not English but history. She's excited about her academic career. As I listen to her, I murmur vague, pleasant, encouraging utterances. I'm happy for her. She has a bright future. "You have a bright future," I say. We wish each other well. Somewhat awkwardly the dialogue ends.

For several moments I am dazed. Inexplicable giddiness has begun to seep into my head. I can hear air seeping into a balloon. The balloon is beige. The phone is warm in my hand. Most bal-

loons are not beige. The gust of nausea rapidly gathers in my chest. I rush, half-stumbling, to the kitchen trash can.

I vomit.

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUOTATION
"There's a great pleasure in teaching freshmen because you're sort of being folded into their lives at a particular, powerful moment in which you can make a difference," he said in the 1996 interview. "And to some degree, you can 'convert' them to English. It becomes a way of trawling for majors." (Source: Cynthia Haven, *Stanford Report,* August 17, 2007)

SOURCES AND ALLUSIONS
He found me in a place known as "The Farm."
His field: to grow a special breed of harm.

His stock of antique furniture and dolls
And manuscripts he nurtured in his walls.

A culture of "American" indifference
To rape he tended with uncommon sense.

Exactly how I came to be a thing
For him to call his own is still a thing

I can't or won't remember. He abused
His powers to leave selves like mine contused.

Where others who preceded me fare now
I often wish yet do not wish to know.

Sometimes I dream that his rare book collection
Is made of all "his" women turned to fiction.



Fig. 1. Stanford University Student ID for Chu, Seo-Young Jennie. Issued 08/18/1999. The photograph shows a young woman of Korean descent.

IS THIS AN EXAMPLE OF IRONY? EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER

I grew up pronouncing the word "women" the way my Korean parents did: the same way we pronounced the word "woman."

It was the professor — my rapist — who corrected my pronunciation of the word "women."

Since then, every time I have uttered "women," I have remembered his voice.

It — his voice — it accompanies mine like an accent.

"Women."

HERE, I FILLED OUT THE FORM

- Year of birth: 1978.

- Place of birth: Northern Virginia.
- First language: Korean. To this day I have dreams in which my young mother is holding me in her arms and whispering to me in achingly melodic strings of Korean syllables.
- Second language: English. When I started school, the teacher told my parents that if they wanted me to succeed in America they would have to communicate with me exclusively in English. From then on my mother and I were estranged. We spoke to each other in an English filled with gaps. It took me decades to recognize the sacrifice my mother made when she stopped speaking to me in our native tongue.
- Language spoken by parents to each other: fluent Korean. I grew up hearing marriage as a foreign language — literally and figuratively. I grew up hearing the sound of Korean as a language of Korean-bound han syndrome, disappointment, fury, resignation, the sense of being trapped forever, resentment, guilt. Every other word: a door slammed.
- Faith system(s): raised Roman Catholic by my mother and Confucian by my father. Currently agnostic.
- How parents met: Their marriage was arranged.
- Significant family trauma(s): the Korean War (which orphaned my father and made him watch his beloved elder brother die); my mother's sister's suicide when I was a child; being run over by a car as a child while waiting for the school bus; struggling as a Roman Catholic teenager with my romantic feelings for a female classmate; being hospitalized during my senior year of college following my first suicide attempt; being raped soon after my first suicide attempt by a professor at Stanford University, where I was just starting a PhD program in English language and literature.

IS THIS AN EXAMPLE OF IRONY? EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER
His interests included The Declaration of Independence. He wrote a book titled *Declaring Independence.*

SYMPATHY FOR JAMES COMEY (SUMMER 2017)
He had called me at lunchtime that day and invited me to dinner that night, saying he was going to invite the whole cohort, but decided to have just me this time, with the whole cohort coming the next time. It was unclear from the conversation who else would be at the dinner, although I assumed there would be others.

It turned out to be just the two of us, seated at a small table in the middle of his favorite restaurant.

The professor began by asking me whether I wanted to stay on in the PhD program, which I found strange because he had already told me twice in earlier conversations that he hoped I would stay, and I had assured him that I intended to. He said that lots of people wanted to work with him and, given the academic pressure and job market, he would understand if I wanted to walk away.

My instincts told me that the one-on-one setting, and the pretense that this was our first discussion about my position, meant the dinner was, at least in part, an effort to have me beg to work with him and create some sort of intimate relationship. That concerned me greatly, given that I wanted to be his advisee.

I replied that I loved my work and intended to stay, write my dissertation, and receive my degree. And then, because the set-up made me uneasy, I added that I was not "interested" in the way people who are dating use that word, but he could always count on me to work hard and try my best to produce good scholarship.

A few moments later, the professor said, "But I'm lonely. I'm needy. I need to feel desirable. I need you to desire me."

I didn't move, speak, or change my facial expression in any way during the awkward silence that followed. I wanted to leave. Instead I froze.

The conversation then moved on, but he would return to the subject near the end of our dinner.

At one point, I tried to explain why it was so important that my personal life be independent of my professional career. I said it was a conundrum: Throughout history, some people in institutional positions of power (e.g., straight white male professors with tenure and endowed chairs, among other privileges) have decided that their positions authorize them to use less powerful people (e.g., 21-year-old first-year graduate students who happen to be female, mentally ill, and 1.5–2nd generation Korean American) in ways that make the powerful even more powerful (while putting the powerless in a risky situation). But the abuse of power can ultimately make the powerful weak by undermining public trust in institutions — including academic institutions — and their work.

Near the end of our dinner, the professor returned to the subject of my status as a student, saying he was very glad I wanted to stay, adding that he had heard great things about me from Professor X, Professor Y, and many others. He then said, "I need you." I replied, "You will always get work from me." He paused and then said, "That's what I want, work from you." I paused, and then said, "You will get that from me." It is possible we understood the phrase "work" differently, but I decided it wouldn't be productive to push it further. The term — "work" — had helped end a very awkward conversation and my explanations had made clear what he should expect.

DURING ONE OF MY EPISODES
Self: Dad?
Dad: Yes, Jennie?
Self: Did Stanford happen?
Dad: What do you mean?
Self: Was it real. The professor. Did all of that actually happen. To me.
Dad (after a pause and a sigh): Yes, it was real. It happened.
Self: Because I couldn't remember if I was remembering something that didn't happen. But it was real. You're not just saying so.
Dad: It happened. It was real.
Self (after a silence): Thanks Dad. I needed to know that.

FILL IN THE BLANK
Crime:
Punishment: suspension for two years without pay

LECTURE (2078)
"Originally the sonnet was a site of sexual violence. Male poets were rewarded for celebrating the women they hunted. They used the sonnet form and an instrument called the 'blazon' to convert their prey into exquisite English artifacts. Our anthologies still include holograms of jewel-like eyes, porcelain skin, ruby lips, hair like gold, and so on.

"Over time the white men themselves modified the sonnet to make it accommodate topics other than male heterosexual desire. The topics came to include blindness, time, spiders, God, the planets, apple-picking, wine, prayer, computers, robots, politics, and the apocalypse. Now, in the year 2078, it is possible to choose existence in a world designed like a sonnet. It is possible to live one's entire life inside a sonnet. It is possible to become a sonnet. — But only if one has consented to such an existence."

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUOTATION
In a 1996 News Service interview, [JF] described the 18th-century attitude toward belongings this way: "There was a sense that objects were preferred over people because they didn't leave you, they didn't talk back, and you could project a certain subjectivity and have an intense relationship with them, particularly with books," he said. (Source: Cynthia Haven, *Stanford Report,* August 17, 2007)

A LITTLE SONG AND A RECEIPT
Doe: a deer, a female deer —
Often chased by sonneteers of old.
Caught, and killed, and bathed in fear,
turned to human blazons to be sold —

Eyes — $twin models of the stars.
Skin — $fine tissue wrought from gold.
Lips — $your favorite kind of flower.
Sex — $a secret still untold/ a Silk Road to unfold/ a thing for you to mold/ a source by you controlled.

Total: $_____.___

THE BLAZONAUT
Setting: an alternative universe where, due to the choreography of molecules here, to use words is to versify. Location: Southwest Canada (not far from where the Golden Gate Bridge is located in our reality). Time: a year named "The Earliest Early Americanist" (corresponding roughly to our year 2000 AD). All residents of this universe hold the following truth to be self-evident: Each person has the right to free consent. Living by this truth is to them as breathing is to us. Rape, in this reality, is an alien phenomenon.

1. News

"… she fell into the water from the sky…"

2. Jae-in Doe

Decedent is an Asian female.
Twenty-two she just had turned.
The cause of death we cannot tell
Despite the many things we've learned.

3. Top Secret

My Doe-type can be difficult to track.
Yet here I am, my voice-box playing back
From lips hydrangea-lavender in hue
His thoughts during our first few interviews.

The hair is shoulder-length, the color black.
The height and weight suggest she won't fight back.
The fingernails are unadorned and short.
The eyes are brown; no makeup do they sport.
The skin appears unpierced and untattooed,

Yet scars of ruby-pearl seem to protrude
Like self-inflicted jewelry on each arm
And wrist — which means she's vulnerable to harm.
The language of her flesh, as I assess her,
Reveals Confucian worship of professors.

Her deference Korean gives me right
To use her innocence for my delight.

4. The Coroner's Soliloquy

The species: neither robot nor a xenomorph but both.

A blazonaut I call her as I scan her for the truth.

Throughout her brain dimensions grew like flowers wild
And han flowed through her circuits like fog-weather mild

until the onslaught
caused a drought.

The genitals, the soul, the lymph, the spine, the nape,
Show evidence of _____
For which we have no name

I can't do this anymore.

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUOTATION
You can keep nothing safe from our eyes and ears. This is your own history. We are your most perilous and dutiful brethren, the song of our hearts at once furious and sad. For only you could grant me these lyrical modes. I call them back to you. Here is the sole talent I ever dared nurture. Here is all of my American education. (Korean American narrator of *Native Speaker* by Chang-rae Lee)

MUTANT BLAZON (AFTER SHAKESPEARE'S SONNET 130)
My rapist's eyes remind me of the sun.
To look at them will mean that I go blind.
His mouth beside my ear — they form a gun.
Each breath: a bullet targeting my mind.

My rapist's eyes remind me of the sun.
His throat: a fist to silence mine designed.
His reason: a ventriloquist's illusion.
No tenor in the end could hearing find.

My rapist's eyes remind me of the sun —
Too close for any vessel with a mind.
Survive or get to die — that is the question.
No longer have I any will to mind.

My rapist's eyes remind me of the sun —
Not dead, not living, neither keen nor blind;
A daily haunting; memory rebegun;
Disaster in some future undivined.

I write, rewrite, a "sonnet" about rape
To hunt that voice I wish I could escape.

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUOTATION (WITHOUT USING THE WORDS "PREDATOR" or "PREY")
There she beholding me with milder look,
Sought not to fly, but fearless still did bide:
Till I in hand her yet half trembling took,
And with her own goodwill her firmly tied.
Strange thing, me seem'd, to see a beast so wild,
So goodly won, with her own will beguil'd.

— From Edmund Spenser's poem "Like As A Huntsman" (Sonnet 67 of his 1595 sonnet cycle *Amoretti*)

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUOTATION (WITHOUT USING THE WORDS "PREDATOR" or "PREY")
"Yeah, that's her in the gold. I better use some Tic Tacs just in case I start kissing her. You know, I'm automatically attracted to beautiful… I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star they let you do it. You can do anything. […] Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything."

— The 45th President of the United States of America

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE
Professor: All men have rape fantasies, including your father.
Student:

A KIND of CENSUS (2016)
- Number of spouses: zero.
- Number of children: zero.
- Longest stretch of time spent alone inside the apartment: eighteen consecutive days.
- Longest stretch of time post-rape without any physical intimacy with another human: seven consecutive years.
- Number of episodes of *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* never seen: zero.
- Year I watched *SVU* for the first time: 2011.
- Year *SVU* started: 1999.
- Number of fantasies about cathartic dialogues with Olivia Benson: countless.
- Number of years spent closeted to most people about what happened at Stanford: sixteen.

FACEBOOK ENTRY POSTED SHORTLY AFTER I CAME OUT AS A SURVIVOR (JULY 5, 2016)
Q: Do you think being raped made you gay?
A: Several people have asked me this question (or a version of it). It is a question worth addressing.

(1) I cannot speak for others who have been raped. I can only speak to my own situation. Please do not mistake anything I write here for a generalization. (2) The first crush I remember having: Ellen Degeneres. At the time I didn't know who she was (I caught a glimpse of her on TV); I didn't know what it meant to be gay; I didn't know what I felt was a crush. All I knew was that she made my heart feel nervous and I wanted to see her face again. (3) My parents had an arranged marriage. The arrangement was less than ideal. They spoke to (argued with) each

other in Korean — a language that my brother and I did not understand — and they spoke to us in (broken-ish) English. To this day I think of marriage as literally a foreign language. (4) My mother was (is) devoutly Catholic. As a child I myself was devoutly Catholic and confused about my sexuality. The last time I went to confession (I was a teenager) I confessed I thought I might be gay and also I wasn't sure if God existed. The priest said he could not forgive me but he could give me holy water for me to keep by my bed to repel Satan. (5) My first sexual experience was being raped at the age of 22 by someone who wielded power over me, who controlled my future, and who was fully aware that I was sexually inexperienced and confused about my sexuality. (6) I spent much of my twenties in relationships that allowed me to pretend (or try to pretend) that Stanford never happened. Does it matter that a few relationships were with men and that a few were with women? I honestly don't know. (7) My last relationship ended a decade ago. Since then my personal life has resembled a desert ruled by agoraphobia and the wish to destroy my capacity to feel attraction. (8) I have been attracted to people of all sexes and gender identities. (9) As the details above are meant to suggest, my sexuality is extremely complicated. Did being raped make me gay? No. (See item 2.) But it is a fact that rape (among many other factors, including those mentioned above) had an impact on how I experience desire and act (or hesitate to act) upon my feelings. Indeed, it may be the case that "rape survivor" is one of my sexual orientations. *I would not wish this joyless and often agonizing orientation on anybody.* (10) Again I stress that I speak only for myself. I doubt it is possible to generalize that rape makes people gay (or straight). Different individuals survive violence in different ways. Some of us end up not surviving. Some of us are working on just holding on. I hope that my answer has been educational.

"NOLI ME TANGERE": A KIND OF VILLANELLE

His ghost stands watching me while I'm asleep.
I know that this cannot be real because

I'm wide awake. I never fall asleep.

The hours between twelve and twelve still keep
Me up reciting poetry because
His ghost stands watching me while I'm asleep.

I close my eyes, imagine rivers deep
And soft plush turquoise emerald velvet moss.
I hide myself here as a pebble heap.

What if I dared to sea from cliff to leap?
My absence from the world would be no loss.
His ghost stands watching me while I'm asleep.

When finally I die, will I escape
His ghost's attention? Or will those glib jaws
Assault my ghost with secrets fresh to keep?

I don't know if I wake or if I sleep
Or why my speech obeys poetic laws.
His ghost stands watching me while I'm asleep.
Perhaps he's dreamt a way my soul to reap, to reap, to reap.

MISSING SUBJECT
Date: Mon, 31 Jan 2000 11:11:07 0800 (PST)
From: Seo-Young Jennie Chu <sjchu@Stanford.EDU>
To: [redacted]
Subject:

M, I wish sometimes that I were a man not a woman. It would make being a young graduate student so much easier in many respects--well, one respect especially.

So that is how I am right now, at this particular moment in time: wishful. If only I were strong, unharrassable, uncompromising, austere. If only I were a cyborg--

Or if only all professors were female! I don't know, I'm making very little sense here. I can't talk; I can only talk around. The problem is that I'm so damn *mistakable.* Maybe even to myself--the scariest thought of all.

It's good that you're in love, I think... Thank you for mentioning the geese, what a breath-taking image, gray but breathless too.

I miss you, I am thinking of you,

Jennie

PALO ALTO DISAPPEARANCE

A yard, once used for some kind of sport, lies seemingly deserted. High above her, in a near-future sky, one allosaurus and one magpie, each the size of a skyscraper, battle for extinction. Crowds of invisible spectators flow toward the spectacle. At some point, when the rumors grow too poisonous, she turns around, against the tide, and starts to climb a secret staircase made out of wisteria, the stems of which twine counterclockwise. The more she climbs, more and more flowers surround her. Blossoms thicken. Petals seep into her hair. Her skin becomes liquid petal.

"Anyone is inside your house," the flowers whisper.

"I don't have a body," she responds.

By now she is no longer climbing a staircase. The staircase has disappeared and so has she.

In the distance another mythical creature falls and another endangered animal cannot hear its own appalling song. Where games of sport once took place, palm trees begin to shimmer, dazzle, daze. She is beyond the last thought at the end of the mind.

Obviously this is not reality.

This was one way I got through it.

TERRIFIED VAGUE PRONOUNS (AFTER YEATS'S "LEDA AND THE SWAN")
As he, to have her, turned into a swan,
So she, to bear it, turned him to a swan.
I often wonder which was worse: the swan
She conjured, or the man inside the swan.
I often wonder which came first: the swan
Whose "blow" (Yeats wrote) was "sudden," or the swan
Whose "sudden blow" was made of piecemeal swan-
Like men in motion slow: from man to swan.

The things that one man did engendered here
A broken mind, the pills within an hour
That should have left me dead. Being caught up,
Accustomed to the comfort of his chair,
Could he possess the knowledge or the power
To see that each from different heights would drop?

AFTER EMILY DOE: FACEBOOK POST (JUNE 2016)
One image that's been invading my mind lately: a mugshot that was never taken. It was never taken because I never pressed charges. I didn't think to press charges.

He's no longer alive. He was my adviser at Stanford. He was a tenured professor, a "big name" in academia. I was a first-year PhD student, 21 years old and stupidly naive. I had also recently been hospitalized after a suicide attempt. I had just been diagnosed as bipolar.

"Your mom and I should have — we didn't know how to prepare you — " my dad said yesterday while we were brokenly discussing the Stanford assault case that has been in the news recently.

To which I could only say, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry you have a daughter who made you go through so much trauma in addition to the Korean War and everything…"

We apologize to each other, my father and I. The Stanford professor refused to apologize to me.

I know I should forgive him. It wasn't his fault.

When he asked me if I was a virgin, I told him the truth: yes. (I should have said: It is none of your business.)

When he told me that he controlled my future, I let myself believe I had no future worth imagining. (I should have been brave and stood up to him.)

I still wake up sometimes to find my clothes drenched in sweat and my body numb, literally numb.

In my head the mugshot is blurry. I scarcely remember what he looked like. I can't bring myself to Google his name.

A REFUGE FOR JINDO

In real life I am not a Korean Jindo dog. But in my dream — my nightmare — I am a Jindo professor, and I am trying in vain to explain to my human students why Theodore Roethke's "Elegy for Jane" is an objectionable poem.

"Grrrrrr," I tell the room. "Roar!"

The students are unconvinced by my argument. They offer smart and compelling counterarguments. Their insights are so brilliant that soon I am succumbing to intellectual vertigo.

A leash squeezes my neck.

Panic, wild. No. I said no! — But the more I thrash, the more I choke. The fury, the frantic despair, the thrashing, the

(Somewhere a mind goes missing. Somewhere somebody's teeth bite the hand that literally feeds.)

Jin-Do falls. A leash dangles vacantly.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM (AFTER SHELLEY'S "OZYMANDIAS")
I meet a stranger in a house of gloom
Appointed with archaic chairs and shelves
Made centuries ago... The stranger's doom
Is my fate too, for that which makes my self
not hers is time alone. Inside that room
She cannot see me but I see her dread,
Her shattered face — Something I know is wrong.
Her body language speaks as though it's dead.
If minds could text, in hers this would appear:
"Your name is Jennie. My name is Seo-Young.
Let me, your future self, bear your despair."

Now that I'm home, I'm drowning in decay,
Pill bottles, trash, her burden mine to bear.
Why did I — she — choose to survive this way?

SEX (AFTER STANFORD)
One of the side effects (for me at least) of being violated: every time I feel desire, attraction, or any evidence of a libido, I au-

tomatically feel guilty. I feel an obligation to cancel my body, delete it, to make it disappear.

The "logic": I have a libido; therefore I could not have been raped.

The truth: *I did not want to be trapped in his house full of horrible shadows and statues.*

FASCICULUS (AFTER EMILY DICKINSON)
Where two thighs meet — a Vertex glows —
My "Sex" — a Bomb or Missile —
Remembrance Now — the Weapon grows —
Turned — inward — at — my — Will –

As Hunters — carcass — make their Prey —
A "Special" "Victim" — I* —
To excavate — Preempt decay —
Extract — from sense of Time —

* Variant: I'm

TO BE ON THE MARKET DURING HIS FESTIVAL
The professor, at once bragging and threatening, had often told my younger self that he controlled my future, my livelihood, my *worth*. (I still ask myself sometimes: "Is my future 'worth' living?")

Being on the job market became a continuously fraught performance. The most excruciating theater took place where no one else could see it: my brain. Denial was a circus act. I don't know how the circus animals survived the mistreatment.

In preparing for the long stressful winters of phone calls and emails and hotel rooms and campus visits and "professional" at-

tire (my rapist liked to talk about grooming me, as if I were a pet — I remember how furious his reaction would be whenever I chose to wear eyeglasses, look frumpy, or let lint appear on my clothing), I should have done this:

I should have worked through the bad memories. I should have worked through the feelings of disgust, self-loathing, humiliation, fear, despair, and hopelessness.

Instead I let the feelings and memories choreograph my actions. I punished my psyche for remembering details about JF. I punished my flesh for what JF did to it.

PSYCHOMACHIA

- We wish we had selected our
Society with much more care.

- The problem is you've shut the door,
Available to life no more.

- But she can't risk or bear the chance
Of misconstruing some advance —

- What if his cultured ways to me
He gave, rape culture a disease?

- I never understood this world.
I still don't understand this world.

REMINDER

And yet he could be vulnerable — alarmingly so. Once, in his house, during a meeting to discuss his course (for which I was a teaching assistant), he began to sob violently. No one else was there. I was sitting at one end of a couch. He sat next to me and — before I could do anything — weighted down my lap with

his head. "I miss my mother," he cried over and over again on my lap.

I was rigid. I was rigid with an emotion for which I still have no name. I don't remember how I got myself out of the situation.

Did part of myself get left behind —? Is that why I can't remember?

SOMETIMES I SCREAMED (AFTER EMILY DICKINSON'S "HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS")
A Special Victim said to me
In Space there is no Rape —
A Special Victim heard from me
In Space there is no Hope —

There is no thing with Feathers, here —
No tune without the words —
Nobody can exist out here —
I'm nothing — Who were you —

CONTUSIONS, RECENT
Whenever I felt the horrible urge to "pleasure" myself, I would often succumb — but not without using a hammer afterwards to punish my flesh with such ferocity that the pain made me pass out.

There were times in my life when my skin ran out of places that were not purple, turquoise, blue, or red.

The alternative to battering my flesh: letting the intrusive ghost of my rapist happily watch me surrender to my libido.

INSTRUCTIONS LEFT INCOMPLETE (AFTER DONNE'S HOLY SONNETS)

Gather our parts, united self, though you
Do not exist quite yet enough to send
Your futuristic wholeness from the end
Of lyric time to where we wait for you.
Make us consent to sentience anew.
Revive our will until there is no end
But endless means by which we all transcend
The paradox you already outgrew.
Believe the story that free will is free.
By then you'll have put on the suit of "me"
As if it were composed of empathy,
A fabric of compatibility.
It's your turn "to be" now. Now you are me.
Please sign your name here if you _____.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS TRUE?

(A) Someone says, "I am lying right now."
(B) Someone says, "Rape me."
(C) Someone says, "I never consented to this alien experiment called 'existence.'"
(D) Someone says, "No means yes."
(E) Someone says, "At least you didn't die."
(F) Someone says, "Why can't you just get over it?"
(G) Someone says, "What you went through is a first-world problem."
(H) Someone says, "What about the Earth and climate change? You have to put rape in perspective."
(I) Someone says, "But you seem okay."
(J) Someone says, "I can't believe how widespread this problem is."
(K) Someone says, "Let me rape you."
(L) Someone says, "Let go."
(M) Someone says, "Am I the only one who can hear all of these voices?"

(N)
(O)

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NAMING
"When you use the word 'rape' to describe what happened to you — can you use a more subtle expression? Something more elegant? You are an English language expert, Jennie, so I trust you must know how to discuss what happened without using that word. There must be a more decent, less ugly way of saying it. I am sure you know of such a way. Jennie? Are you upset? Why are you crying? Did I say something wrong? Jennie, say something. Please, I'm sorry. Jennie, what did I do?"

PASTORAL
Dream this morning: An empty campus. Palm trees. Manicured lawns. Parking lots. A sky made entirely of artificial sunlight. I wander from grave to grave. Most are vacant. A few are filled with stones. What's over there? A robust garden of flowers. I approach the garden and discover that it is somehow overlaid with a prolific cemetery geometric in design. Each grave is open. Each grave is occupied by the rotting corpse of a woman of East Asian descent.

A green tendril embracelets my left wrist. Petals grapple vigorously with the places in my mouth and throat that once made language. Just before I succumb, I manage to say one word: the word "farm." It's a meaningless utterance, pointless and unhelpful, but I wake up bleating it in the cold blue-gray bedroom air. "Farm. Stanford. Farm."

CLEAR THOUGHTS IN A CLEAR SHADE (AFTER MARVELL'S "THE GARDEN")
To vanquish all my memories' blight
I swallow dots that promise light.

Ellipses of unconsciousness
Unknow me into happiness.
What science fiction is this space
Where time is just another place?
No apples drop about my head
Yet "apples" I can "taste" instead.
Such luscious freedom from the past
Is pleasure after pain has passed.
Once human life I finally shake
A shape past human I will take.
Were I a Daphne turned to tree
I'd pray for flames to set me free.
Tillandsia I'd rather be,
A lock of air, the dew my key.

Yet still I live, an idiot,
A shadow that can strut and fret.
Why human form? Why woman form?
Collapse me into formlessness
Until existence nonsense is:
The sonic and the furious,
A nothing of significance;
— An alien of consciousness;
A spacetime of unconsciousness.

RESURRECTION LULLABY (AFTER MILTON'S "WHEN I CONSIDER HOW MY LIGHT IS SPENT")
When one considers how one's life is spent,
Each resurrected self another hide
Less human than the one that last had died,
One's brain a frozen bruise that can't consent
To heal after the violence he meant,
His afterlife itself slow homicide,
"Please let my will complete the suicide,"
One prays. But other voices, to relent
That prayer, interrupt, "One did not need

Apology, redress, or an arrest
To live as though his punishment were great.
Survival was enough to fill the need
Required by existence of each guest.
Your prayer's heard. Now fall asleep and wait."

DREAM
Outside: a Farm. Inside: a dimly lit living room. A constellation of antique furniture. A couch. A young woman, my height, we're standing in the room looking at each other, no one else is in the room, she looks like me but her hair is longer and her cheeks are fuller and the scars on her arms are still visible. I notice them because she's gesturing. She's pointing at the couch. "That's where I die," she says. "That's where you must take my place. There is no other way. I have no future worth living."

I used to hate these dreams. I'm learning to live with them. They're like the dreams I have of North Korea. They're like the dreams I have of life after death.

The next time I see her I will say:

Forgive yourself for having been naive.
You've dwelled here for too long. It's time to leave.

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUOTATION
"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

THE GRADUATE MENTORING AWARD (NOTE: THE AWARD WAS RENAMED IN AUGUST, SOON AFTER THE LETTER WAS SENT)
To: June 2016
Executive Director
American Society for _____

Dear Professor _____,

Recently I learned that there is a graduate mentoring award named after (I'm just going to force myself to spell out his name) Jay Fliegelman.

This man was supposed to be my dissertation adviser. I say "supposed to be" because he spent more time sexually harassing and stalking me than he did advising me academically. Instead of discussing ideas, scholarship, or projects, he "mentored" me with insights such as "All men have rape fantasies, including your father." (That is a line I will never forget.) He left me voice messages about overdosing on male enhancement pills. He shared explicit fantasies with me — despite my protests. He violated my flesh, my psyche, my sense of bodily integrity — despite knowing that I was *unwilling*, despite knowing that I was a virgin, despite knowing that I was incapacitated by mental illness. He must have known, too, that I was under the influence of his institutional power. I was new to Stanford, new to California, new to the profession. He had been in the profession and at Stanford for decades. Indeed, his own mentors and former dissertation advisers were still teaching and advising in the Stanford English department when I arrived as a 21-year-old first-year PhD student. Only from this temporal distance can I see so clearly his power and my powerlessness.

For years I have struggled to be a model survivor. I wouldn't want to get Stanford into trouble, right? I should show how grateful and uncomplaining I am — after all, Stanford punished the professor by suspending him for two years without pay,

right? Stanford, too, has remained silent about the case. There is no public record of what happened. — Not even a concise announcement describing the nature of Jay Fliegelman's misconduct and punishment. (Does Stanford not understand that in the absence of clear communication, rumors and misinformation have a tendency to grow?)

In the past few weeks I've learned that the years of silence surrounding Jay Fliegelman's misconduct and punishment have had a number of consequences that are regrettable. One of these consequences: the creation of the award mentioned above. This graduate mentoring award is named after a man who abused his power, who refused to apologize for raping his student, who screamed at and terrified his student, who dropped by his student's dorm unannounced causing the student to hide in her closet in the dark wondering "How long do I have to stay here? Is he gone yet?" — whose ghost continues to haunt his student to this day.

I have worked hard to forgive Professor Fliegelman. I realize he was human and complex. I am sure he was a good mentor to many students. I admire the loyalty and gratitude that former students of Jay Fliegelman have demonstrated by creating this award. I do not know if they are or were aware of what he did to me. Perhaps they were unaware of the extent to which Professor Fliegelman caused damage. In any case, if any former students are reading this: Now you know.

I understand the "Jayfest." I have no objection to naming his collection of books "the Fliegelman Library." [NOTE: After learning more about the Fliegelman Library, I asked Stanford to rename the collection. Today the Fliegelman Library no longer exists. See "I, Discomfort Woman" in this volume.] But what hit me in the solar plexus and made — makes — me feel sick: seeing the website for the Jay Fliegelman award for *graduate mentorship* (seeing the "mugshots" of professors honored for mentoring students the way Jay Fliegelman mentored his students) and

recognizing one of my graduate professors from a non-Stanford university — a professor who has been nothing but professional and kind to me. "Are these awards given to advisers who sexually harass and rape their students?" I wondered — "and if so what did Professor X do to deserve such an obscene award?"

The thought now strikes me as absurd. But it is no more absurd than the existence of an award for graduate mentoring named in honor of a man whose "mentoring" included threats, controlling behavior, objectification of a student's body, and sexual violence. Surely there are better examples in whose honor this award might be renamed.

If you are one of Jay Fliegelman's former students who had an experience worth celebrating: I believe you. You need not provide documentation to persuade me. I believe that, in your experience, he was a wonderful mentor. Is it too much for me to ask you to believe me too?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Seo-Young Chu

DEPENDENCE

For years I have carried only blurry vivid shards: a dimly lit apartment; a woman, not my mother, lighting candles on a birthday cake; a different woman, turquoise in hue, painted on the surface of the cake; my mind wondering if today was my birthday; being told (I struggled to comprehend) that it was the turquoise woman's birthday, that it was everybody's birthday; — and then fireworks literally exploding outside in the night skies.

Recently I brought these dreamy shards to my father's attention and he exclaimed: "Oh! That was not a dream. That must have been John's mother. You and John were both toddlers. You played together all the time. We lived in the same apartment

building near Washington, DC. They had the best view of the fireworks, so they invited us over. That was while we were saving money to move to a house. And your brother had not yet been born. But he was there."

"And — the woman — was she Korean too?" I asked.

My dad: "John's mother? No, she was born and raised in Mexico."

Self: "She was the one holding the cake celebrating America's birthday? That's my first memory?"

Dad: "It must be. So it was July 4, 1980. You were two years old. Two and a half."

Self: "Where are they now?"

Dad: "Oh, I have no idea. Everyone was so busy."

Self (unable to stop the horrible speech balloon from escaping my throat): "The Fourth of July was [my Stanford rapist's] favorite holiday."

Dad:

Self: "Sorry. I'm sorry! I don't know why my mind went there." (Pause) "At least I'm not breaking down sobbing and screaming and trying to hurt myself. Right?"

(long han-filled silence in which our heads are swarming loudly with many pasts, many nows, and many futures)

Dad: "Jennie. You are getting better. I know it. I believe it. This. Is. Progress."

WHY I AM JOINING THE MARCH (JANUARY 2017)
In an ideal world, my body and mind together would join the march — in person, in public, in visible protest.

In an ideal world, my flesh would freely will itself outside and onto the streets to demonstrate out loud against the inauguration of a man whose irresponsible and casual expressions of entitlement and violence have amplified the trauma (the injury, the bleeding wound) of rape culture.

In an ideal world, the president of the United States of America would not be so eerily reminiscent of a specific nightmare from my own personal past: a man in a position of power who sexually harassed and violated me seventeen years ago, a man whose ghost lives on in this Yellow-Haired-Man-In-An-Ultimate-Position-Of-Power.

In an ideal world, the pain that I am experiencing right now would not exceed the sum of the medical conditions with which I have been diagnosed (including post-traumatic stress, bipolar depression, spinal herniation, fibromyalgia, anxiety, and chronic migraines).

In an ideal world, there would be female as well as male US presidents.

Yet I believe in the reality of ideal worlds. They can be articulated. They can be drawn. They can be painted. They can be diagrammed. They can be meditated. They can be realized.

EPILOGUE
I am one of the lucky ones

~~I am one of the lucky ones I am~~

Transcranial Iambic Submission

Consider This
a Valentine,
a silent Wish
from "Stranded Mind"

to "Lady Cutting
Edge," the Boss
whose Clicks instill
Magnetic Buzz.

I sat inside
your prayer Chair
and stayed until
The Here was There

And suddenly
(Nerves giving way)
the Clicks began
to Constellate.

I felt your Charge
Take Root today.

Electric Hope —

Candescent Brain.

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I, Discomfort Woman: A Fugue in F Minor

This is a poem about fire.

"What he told his students and fellow scholars was to pay attention to the physicality of a book." [1][1]

Did you know there was a "Forgotten War" in the year 1812?

Fill in the blank: "In the year 1812, _____ happened in Korea."

This is a poem about a fire that never happened.

Handwritten: "Douglass Narrative $150,000." [2]

In the year 1666 the early American poet Anne Bradstreet wrote "Here Follows Some Verses Upon the Burning of Our House."

Symptoms include a sense of a foreshortened future.

---

1 Numbers refer to notes at the end of the book.

Did you know there was a "Forgotten War" in the years 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953?

"Polyptoton" means repetition of words derived from the same root.

Some of us have no roots.

Here is an example of polyptoton: "The refugee was lost in a fugue state."

Did you know there is a war being forgotten right now?

Handwritten: "Wheatley $50,000." [3]

"It was not a penchant for reading them that sustained him, but rather a passion for collecting them." [4]

If you don't believe me, Google "foreshortened future."

Answer this question: Forgotten by whom?

This is a poem about a fire that never happens in our timeline.

"It is a single collection; the books speak to each other." [5]

Symptoms include ruptures in space and time.

Why were the American soldiers burning school chairs? I asked and my Korean father replied: Oh, that winter was so cold. There wasn't much wood to burn. The chairs were made of wood.

Fugiō: "to flee."

It is a single collection of timelines that speak to each other.

Did Anne Bradstreet, forced to flee her home as it was lost to fire, feel her future foreshortening?

Lines of time: strings of a musical instrument.

Symptoms include rootlessness.

What happens when you strum them?

Flee, fight, fawn, freeze.

I wonder who built those school chairs lost to fire.

"Hwabyung" in Korean means "fire illness."

From the same root: 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953.

My father was a child at the time.

This is a poem about a fire illness.

He was part of a crowd of refugees who were forced to flee their homes.

The truth is that I fear the fire.

"Although Bradstreet embraced Petrarchism as a poetic language, she objected to the ways in which male poets used the sonnet to objectify and silence women." [6]

Fear the fire that speaks through me when I am furious.

Handwritten: "Bradstreet $10,000." [7]

Fill in the blank: No book is worth more than a _____.

"I'd go to a bookstore and see them stored wrongly and just feel the drama of the 'skin' coming off in a slow battle against the weight." [8]

Answer this question: Are women objects?

I, too, was once a bookish child.

He "collected association copies, books owned and in most cases signed or annotated by a person of historical significance." [9]

Symptoms include travel through time.

Who counts as a person of historical significance?

"These books have a great, sometimes huge, added value largely because of who owned them." [10]

Who counts as a person?

This is a poem about what the Framers framed.

From the same timeline: 1953, 1978, 2000, 2018.

The fire in this poem, I assure you, is purely figurative.

"'Let me show you now what many people consider the best book in my collection,' he said, then laid before me a protective box containing two volumes, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), and *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), also by Douglass (1818–1825)." [11]

Who or what were the Founding Fathers?

It is a single collection; the women don't speak.

"Here Follows Some Verses Upon the Burning," she wrote.

Fill in the blank: There are timelines where _____ never happened.

What happens when you strum them?

The opposite of "Forgotten War" is not "Remembered Peace."

On July 27, 1953, there was a ceasefire of some kind.

Fill in the blank: The opposite of "ceasefire" is _____.

Did you know that some Koreans fear the number four?

His favorite holiday was the Fourth of July.

Because it sounds like death.

Answer this question: Do fireworks sound to you like war?

Flee, fawn, freeze, fight.

This is a poem that will end with "ceasefire."

From an essay in *The New Yorker*: "He showed me his inscribed first edition of 'My Bondage and My Freedom' and told me he knew all about the size of Frederick Douglass's penis and the smallness of the vaginas of the white women with whom he had affairs. 'Picture it,' he said, stroking the spine of the book as he moved closer, pressing himself against me. I later learned that he'd been banned from campus." [12]

The ceasefire in this poem, I assure you, is purely literal.

Answer this question: Why wasn't he fired?

This is a poem about a fire that should have happened.

You will remember thinking to yourself that you cannot stay in your body.

Maybe our timeline is broken.

In the year 2000 the William Robertson Coe Professor of American Literature in the English Department at Stanford University used a rare and expensive "association copy" to violate a 22-year-old Korean American _____ named Jennie Chu. [13]

A fugue is a form of forgetting.

She remembered thinking to herself: I cannot stay in this body.

Here is another example of polyptoton: "The origin of my dissociation: an association copy."

The book was covered with waste sheets from an 18th-century pornographic novel. [14]

She could not stay in that body.

Forgotten by whom?

The truth is that I used to love books.

Sociare: "to join."

The origin of my dissociation: an association copy.

Answer this question: Why?

A dissociative fugue is when the self flees and seeks refuge elsewhere.

It was during my slow, nearsighted discovery of the pornographic content of the waste sheets that, against my will, I became closely associated, literally and figuratively, to the William Robertson Coe Professor of American Literature in the English Department at Stanford University.

What is the opposite of "to join"?

By "closely" I mean "forcibly."

I cannot stay in this body.

The pornographic waste sheets covered "Barbarities of the Enemy," a book-length "compilation of reports gathered for an investigation into the barbarities (and this is the correct word to use) committed by the Foul and Most Foreign English upon the Brave and most Virtuous Citizens of the United States" during the "Forgotten War" of 1812. [15]

Why couldn't I stay in my body?

From "Barbarities of the Enemy": "Her story was too shocking in its details to meet the publick eye." [16]

Fight, freeze, fawn, flee.

Where did I go?

From "Barbarities of the Enemy": "she discovered every thing which her convulsive struggles, between shame and a desire to expose her brutal assailants, would permit." [17]

My ancestors dissociated so that their descendants would relive.

According to Stanford's general counsel, I must have been sent into a state of shock so severe that I dissociated while being

forced to watch the "porno video" that she mentions in her summary of the report —the "porno video" that I do not remember watching at all. [18]

The opposite of "to join" is "to fall apart."

"No, you were not drugged," she told me in 2018. "You must have been traumatized. But you were not drugged." [19]

Hwabyung is when fire ignites generations of han.

"But how can I believe you?" I asked, and she replied, "You'll just have to trust me."

Han I reclaim.

"Stanford acquires late professor's renowned collection of 'association copies.'" [20]

What if hwabyung is not an illness at all?

Han I reclaim and redefine as my Korean American response to injustice.

"…a collection of remarkable copies of texts ranging from America's Colonial period up through the Civil War…" [21]

Here is another example of polyptoton: "Our pathos was not pathological."

What if the fire of hwabyung is necessary?

"…one of the most important examples of its kind in the world, and would surely become a magnet to scholars, from diverse disciplines, for generations to come…" [22]

Fill in the blank: "When in the course of human events _____."

The model minority left my body, like a ghost.

"… one of the most impressive book collections likely to be put up for sale in our time." [23]

And what replaced the ghost was fire.

Hwabyung I reclaim and redefine as a cathartic way of experiencing political agency and creative power.

"The price of the collection is confidential." [24]

Answer this question: Who funded the collection of rare books?

The Forgotten War of 1812 rhymes with the Forgotten War of 1950.

"… suspended for two years without pay." [25]

Did you know there is a "Forgotten War" happening right now?

Listen as the fire becomes a voice.

Forgotten by whom?

The silence of Japan rhymes with the silence of Stanford English. [26]

From "Barbarities of the Enemy": "women will never publish what they consider their own shame." [27]

Fire annihilates, fire purifies, fire lights the dark, fire heats the cold.

The shame is not mine.

In the year 2018 a Korean American rape survivor named Seo-Young Chu visited the library in person, held that same book in her hands, and somehow did not uproot the pages from the book's spine.

F is for "futile." F is for "failure."

And I remembered the _____ that could not be forgotten.

The failure was not mine.

"Why didn't you uproot the pages from the book's spine?" someone asked.

Childhood memory: My Korean father pulls textbooks from a showcase bookshelf in an American furniture store.

Listen. I am trying to answer.

Books (not even for sale) in a model furniture showroom: more important to him than the furniture he came here to buy with his family.

Should I have uprooted the pages from the book's spine?

My Korean father leaves the store having bought zero furniture and all the books he could find.

Handwritten: "Madison Jefferson Copy Paradise Lost $150,000." [28]

Books on math, books on grammar.

In the car, in the parking lot outside the furniture store, his Korean wife is embarrassed, hurt, livid. His Korean American children are silent, confused. But he is unapologetic.

Fill in the blank: "Seo-Young Chu $_____."

His children will receive the best possible American education.

"The dehumanizing effect of their Petrarchan verse, which objectifies women and converts them into silent, absent, unknowable figures, was recently described to early Americanist readers by Seo-Young Chu, who recounts her rape at the hands of an academic adviser." [29]

What does it take to remember a Forgotten Rape?

In the year 2021 a Korean American survivor named Seo-Young Chu asked Stanford yet again to rename the library and engage in restorative dialogue with her. [30]

Fire heats the cold, fire purifies.

And in the year 2021 Stanford made the library disappear.

What happened to his "renowned collection" of rare and expensive books?

The library "no longer exists," they said. [31]

Dear Stanford: It should never have come to this. [32]

Fire annihilates, fire lights the dark.

Answer the question: What happened to the book that raped me?

"The gaps in my CV are trauma-generated plot holes that lead to northern California in the year 2000." [33]

Answer the question: Why wasn't he fired long ago?

This is a poem that needs to exist.

Dear Stanford: The fire is speaking. Listen.

This is a poem about fire.

"… body stripped of its parts, to be cataloged as a series of rare and beautiful objects…" [34]

Buried somewhere on "The Farm": a recording of a 22-year-old Korean American woman's voice saying "No."

I light the dark, I purify.

This is a poem about a fire that happens in another timeline.

I annihilate, I heat the cold.

In this poem, the daughter of an orphan of the Korean War infiltrates Green Library's Special Collections at Stanford University and sets fire to the book that raped her.

The fire in this poem, I assure you, is purely figurative.

In this poem, I turn his book to ash.

This is a poem that was written by the fire.

I am the fire that wrote the poem you're reading.

This is a poem about a fire that never happens in our timeline.

I am the fire that turned his library, his legacy, to ash.

This is a poem that will end with "ceasefire."

Let this poem end in ceasefire, ceasefire, ceasefire, ceasefire.

INTERLUDE

The 38th Parallel of Living in Ceasefire in the Year 2016

Under my desk, head against wall, limbs folded in heaps on the floor, I open my eyes. (My body, it seems, migrated here last night.) Fingers are tangled in cords and computer wires. In my dream, the dream from which I am still awaking, those same fingers are tangled in the geometries of a vast chain link fence. I have been climbing this fence and am about to navigate the tricky crest of concertina wiring. Behind me: fog, memory, catastrophic dust. Before me: lush clarity, waters reflecting azure skies, wilderness of strange azaleas and stranger gazelles, futurescape into which I would plunge from the top of the fence — diving in alien gravity — and out of which I would emerge in the form of a tree.

I have no right to such sanctuary. It is not mine. It is not yet. But for a moment in a dream, a dream on the morning of my 38th birthday, it feels — it felt — as though the DMZ in Korea might welcome me back.

concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire ~~concertina wire~~ concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina wire concertina

INTERLUDE

Excerpts from an Email from My Father

Within months, the Allied forces pushed the North Korean forces all the way back to areas close to the Yalu River.

By this time, our family had come home from our hiding place in the mountain village. We hoped that we would go back to our usual pre-war life. We thought peace would stay.

But conditions in the recaptured areas of South Korea were not calm and peaceful. Some people began to question the motives of the families who spent those months under the control of the North Korean forces. They began to accuse many of these families of being North Korean sympathizers. They did not recognize that many of us, including our family, were simply unable to get away.

Finally, I guess under the heavy pressure from those paranoid people, my father's junior high school administrators were forced to take an outrageous action. They dismissed my father from his job.

It was true that by giving my father a job, the American priest saved our family from starvation. But the tranquility in our family did not last long.

My eldest brother came home, gravely ill from the malnutrition caused by the shortage of food in his Korean National Guard unit where corrupt military officers smuggled out some of the grains reserved for the soldiers for their own private profits. Having managed to come home, my eldest brother did not survive long.

My mother became Catholic after my eldest brother died. Obviously she suffered enormously, but she stoically bore the pain. The death devastated my father, who became gravely ill.

My father became Catholic in his deathbed.

After my father died, my mother sold the thatched-roof house, which had three rooms: two in its main part and the third facing the small road at the end of the house. For a couple of years that followed the death of my father, we survived — I believe — largely on the proceeds of the sale of our thatched-roof house. My mother and I moved to a small room at the end of our old house, the main part of which was now occupied by the new owners.

[Image description: A black border outlines an empty white rectangle. Imagine the empty white space swarming with ghosts.]

INTERLUDE

Postmemory Alt Text / Fugue in Dream Minor

~~My father drew this black-and-white sketch of how he remembers his childhood home in 1940s Korea. The home is pictured as if the viewer is looking down at it from a slightly elevated angle. The dimensions of the home are modest. It is a single-story home. The roof is thatched. There are three windows and a small porch with two steps leading to a cozy yard. There are no visible signs of life~~.

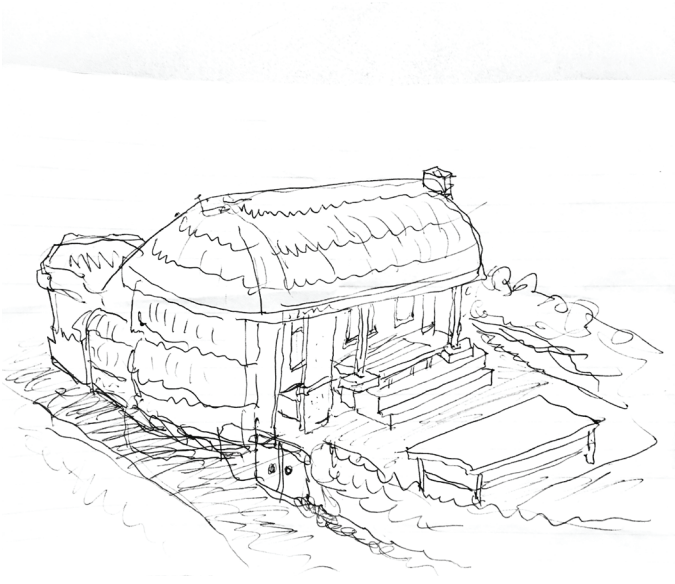


Fig. 2. My father drew this black-and-white sketch of how he remembers his childhood home in 1940s Korea. The home is pictured as if the viewer is looking down at it from a slightly elevated angle. The dimensions of the home are modest. It is a single-story home. The roof is thatched. There are three windows and a small porch with two steps leading to a cozy yard. There are no visible signs of life.

Fugue in Dream Minor

A Korean tiger chases you down a flight of stairs.

The darkness has the quality of light.

For hours that feel like decades, you flee.

The darkening has the quality of illumination.

The fleeing has the quality of floating.

How you flee without fear is impossible.

The tiger chasing you has the quality of folklore.

The stairway turns into the entrance of an empty bunker.

From the ceiling, which is clay, roots branch downward like chandeliers or like family trees.

Each branch drips with tiny icicles.

"They're frozen teardrops," the tiger says from a halmoni-shaped Absence beside you.

He rarely talked about her.

To mention her is dangerous.

You realize then that the tiger is a figure of speech.

Silently you watch as the Absence uses her tiger-fingertips/human-claws to pluck those teardrops from the roots.

She drowned in a well shortly after the end of the Korean War.

"They're good for you. Here, try it," she murmurs, offering you an icy teardrop.

Your father is the one who found her body.

As soon as you taste it, "You" becomes "I": the present tense becomes the past.

Sunlight, September 1941. I looked into my newborn father's eyes for the first time.

The teardrop dissolves.

"Why have you been chasing me?" you ask, and your grandmother replies,

"I needed to catch you in time."

When you wake up, you will find lines on your arms and face where the desk and the Korean textbooks you had been reading before falling asleep must have pressed against your flesh.

They remind you of meshwork.

You are held in a net and never let go.

INTERLUDE

Homework for Dr. R. (2019)

He surprised me by showing up at my doorstep. With furniture.

"Don't be mad," he said. (He's done this kind of thing before.)

"But! But Dad! I never asked for any of this!" I said as my father marched into my apartment dragging shelves, coatracks, and other household items behind him. Soon there was a pile of furniture limbs and sockets in the middle of the room. A room I had recently organized to my liking.

"— Some daughters would be grateful," my father said. He was starting to assemble one of the cabinets.

"Some daughters would feel as if the IMF is replacing a perfectly fine organic way of arranging files and clothes with an alien oppressive patriarchal regime," I instantly regretted saying.

My father didn't respond. He didn't look at me. He continued assembling a plastic cabinet he had purchased at a local mart. He reminded me (absurdly) of a kid opening a toy on Christmas morning. His face was unreadable. Blank. I have never seen pictures of my father as a child. And then it hit me: a wave of

(please) not this again, han plus the force of a double illness inherited from one or both of my parents. Slamming the body, stranding in its wake something kneeling and wretched and humanoid: indebtedness.

This trick my mind has played on me before. I look at my father and I see the youngest of many siblings. I see a future IMF economist growing up in a thatched-roof house. His Korea is "developing" and not yet divided. I see a child among other refugees fleeing troops during the Korean War. At one point he almost falls, terrified, from a bridge into a river. I see an orphan burying family members who keep dying from the war and its insidious afterlife. He seeks refuge, safety, opportunity in America. I see an immigrant memorizing Norman Lewis books while living in a condemned building in NYC. He works and goes to school full-time. His dissertation in economics wins a prize at Columbia. No family members are alive—or born—to congratulate him. He has yet to meet my mother. Their marriage has not yet been set up.

I see a dad pulling textbooks from a showcase bookshelf in a furniture store. Books (not even for sale) in a model furniture showroom: more important to him than the furniture he came here to buy with his family. He leaves the store having bought zero furniture and all the books he could find. In the car, in the parking lot, his wife is embarrassed, hurt, furious. His children are silent, confused. But he is unapologetic. His son and daughter will receive the best possible education. His daughter, he hopes, will be like his own father whom he worships: a scholar, teacher of literature.

I see a father who does not know how to understand the fact that his daughter is breaking down. Breaking down because of the famous professor of literature who raped, harassed, and shamed her at a university he once revered. I see a survivor whose daughter did not inherit his resilience. A daughter who

during the bleakest moments—this bleakness she cannot control— wishes she had died instead of staying in academia.

To be the child of someone so orphaned, so grandchildless, and still so optimistic —. The optimism is what aches. It is violently counterintuitive. Don't say my dad is lucky to have a daughter like me. By now even he knows the truth. *My DNA is laced with bitter voices. If you cut flesh from my arm, you would smell Korean pears that refuse to sweeten. The taste of salt would seep into your mouth from your eyes. Finally you would envision dirty yellow leaves lying next to you on the ground. I was born with remnants of disaster in my marrow. Debris, dirt, earth spreading throughout my body. How can I avoid becoming the grave of ghosts my parents love dearly but somehow cannot name out loud?*

My father deserves a better daughter. Spouseless, childless, reluctant to be alive: I am not what he had in mind when he first traveled to America. Han means we don't have a choice. I owe him more than reluctance.

"Dad. You're right. I did need all this furniture," I lie, but the next part isn't a lie. "I'm sorry for losing my temper. Thanks for getting all this. Let me help. What can I do. Honestly what can I do."

IMF:
A Fugue

When X was a Korean boy, he constructed an artificial intelligence.

All of this is true, more or less.

By "Korean" I mean "forgotten."

The keys, the keys are missing.

When X was a forgotten boy, he constructed an artificial intelligence.

Remember to memorize the capital letters.

I think he's asleep.

Find the key words, wherever they may be, and "underline them."

"Why did you construct an artificial intelligence?" I asked in a dream and he said "I no longer remember."

From the Greek word for forgetfulness: Lethe.

Do you remember forgetting?

This is a fugue in the key of artificial forgetting.

From the Latin word for clear water: lymph.

Already we were living in the long 1950.

But how do I know what to capitalize?

"A, B, C," the teacher sang.

Answers to children have no keys.

"i, m, f," I heard.

By "children" I mean "American children."

Let's call X's artificial intelligence "imf."

Answers to American children have no Korean keys.

It rhymes with "lymph."

"English. Talk to your daughter in English only."

This is a fugue that cannot be translated into Korean.

What one must understand is that imf lived in X's psyche the way chickens live in eggs and eggs live in chickens.

Define "lymph," the teacher said.

Which came first?

For some reason I imagined immaculately mothered fetuses.

Maybe it was an acronym for "inner monologic feedback."

And when did World War Two finally end?

Without lymph there is no immune system.

The year imf came into being was by coincidence the year Korea gained independence from Japan.

By "coincidence" I mean "accident."

The year Korea gained independence from Japan was by accident the year Charles Bonesteel and Dean Rusk divided the Korean Peninsula along the 38th parallel.

Have you found the right keys yet?

By "accident" I mean "design."

The year Charles Bonesteel and Dean Rusk divided the Korean Peninsula along the 38th parallel was by design the year X's young brain began to generate self-awareness.

And by "design" I mean "catastrophe."

The year X's young brain began to generate self-awareness was by catastrophe the year imf came into being.

This is a fugue in the keys of coincidence, accident, design, and catastrophe.

Then X's sister disappeared up North.

I don't know if "capitalism" should be capitalized.

Where did she go?

I don't remember why the Forgotten War started.

What did Capitalism do to Korea?

By "Forgotten" I mean "Misbegotten."

i must flee.

Misbegotten by whom?

ignore military fire.

Which way is the Capital city of Korea?

isolate mental faculties.

We are still living in the long 1950.

Only imf could manage X's reactions to the violence of Korean division.

Now do you get how the Misremembered War changed X's memory?

Somebody lost the keys.

impervious mental fortress.

It forced X to watch his elder brother starve to death.

By "memory" I mean "life."

It nearly drowned X in a river while he was fleeing troops.

What if they were lost on purpose?

It turned X into an orphan.

i miss family.

No fund can refund you for the unnameable debt you inherited from the war.

This is a fugue in the keys of death, life, family, and debt.

Meanwhile X's artificial intelligence grew ever more complex.

i must forget.

Change the locks.

intricately mediated forgetting.

Find the key letters, wherever they may be, and "capitalize them."

I Miss Family. I Must Forget.

What happens when a marriage is arranged between an orphaned robot and a Catholic hurricane?

Intricately Mediated Forgetting.

Change the keys.

X grew up, married a Catholic hurricane, moved to America, fathered two half-robot half-hurricane children, and got a job at the International Monetary Fund, where he worked as an economist for over two decades.

All of this is both less than true and more than true.

"What does the IMF do?" a schoolmate once asked and I could not answer.

English only.

What did the IMF do to Korea?

"The IMF is my dad," I almost said.

It was a kind of immune response.

Intensely Misguided Frugality.

By "immune" I mean "trauma."

Intergenerational Misplaced Fear.

Year after year the IMF took over more and more of X's personality until the human boy who had constructed imf in the 1940s fell gravely asleep, waking up only when X was unconscious.

Insularly Masterful Functioning. Infinitely Mandatory Forgetting.

Define "IMF," the teacher said and I replied: "Originating in the 1940s, a paternalistic artificial intelligence — a father figure — to whom developing countries are indebted."

By "developing countries" I mean "children."

Remember: No fund can refund you for the unnameable debt you inherited from the war.

This is a fugue that is constantly revising itself in the key of unnameable you.

When you were a forgotten boy, you constructed an artificial intelligence.

I Must Feel, I Must Feel.

Sometimes when you are asleep in the next room I can hear the forgotten boy crying in Korean.

Forgive us our debts.

How does one solve for X?

It's still locked.

This is a fugue in too many keys.

I, my father's

ill-mental filial

imago, maze freedom

in meteoric feeling

This page left intentionally ~~unconscious~~ ~~asleep~~ ~~alone~~

Please use the space above to draw a picture of what you are feeling right now.

Two Koreas in the Key of Emily Dickinson

I Drifted* — rainful — as a Shroud —
Above the "DMZ" —
I felt a Scrutinizing Route* —
Of Cranes flow Soft through me —

As Rivers cross the Green below —
As Musk Deer cross the Hills —
As "Borders" cross Peninsula* —
I fell* — the Lakes* to Fill —

*Wandered; Floated
*Crowd
*Korean land
*dropped; died
*Swamps; Marsh

Science-Fictional North Korea: A Defective Fugue

Juche/1
Decades later, in Juche/86 (Gregorian Year 1997), time itself will have been re-calibrated anachronistically by the birth on 4/15/1912 of Kim Il-sung, future Eternal President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Juche/30
A mystical swallow, a double rainbow, and the birth of a heavenly star predict that Kim Jong-il, North Korea's future Dear Leader, will be born in Juche/31 atop sacred Paektusan.

8/10–11/1945
Korea is carved into a Soviet fragment and a US fragment. This event occurs half-a-planet away from Korea itself and half-a-day into Korea's past. The decision to split Korea along the 38th parallel is made in a matter of hours in Washington, DC by two inexperienced members of the State-War-Navy Coordinating

Committee: Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel. With little time to complete their task, and little knowledge of the soon-to-be-severed land, the two men consult a National Geographic map before choosing an intangible line as a boundary that will satisfy equally the US and the USSR, both of whom recognize the geopolitically strategic location of the Korean peninsula. No Koreans are consulted.

Summer/1948
South Korea, or the Republic of Korea (ROK), formally comes into existence. North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), formally comes into existence. A riddle emerges. Has an ancient nation been amputated? Or have two new nations — "twin siblings" — been born?

1965
President Sukarno of Indonesia presents Kim Il-sung with an unprecedented variety of orchid: "kimilsungia."

1973
Throughout North Korea, citizens continue to vanish into a growing network of torture camps. Later, survivors will offer testimony about unspeakable atrocities witnessed and endured in DPRK prisons. Some of the most horrific accounts describe suffering of female prisoners and children.

11/1974
The first of numerous North Korean infiltration tunnels under the DMZ (Korean Demilitarized Zone) is discovered by the South.

1978
ROK director Shin Sang-ok and ROK actress Choi Eun-hee are kidnapped by aspiring filmmaker Kim Jong-il. Shin and Choi are forced to direct and star in movies produced by Kim Jong-il. Their cinematic collaborations will end in 1986, when Shin and Choi successfully escape their captors.

1983
Future DPRK Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un is born.

1985
The monster fantasia movie *Pulgasari* is released in North Korea.

1987
Pyongyang begins construction on the Ryugyong Hotel. The rocket-shaped structure will later attract epithets such as "Ghostscraper," "Hotel of Doom," and "Deathstar."

1988
Horticulturalist Kamo Mototeru invents "kimjongilia," a begonia designed to bloom annually on Kim Jong-il's birthday.

1989
As the fall of the Berlin Wall dominates headlines, the DMZ continues its subtle metamorphosis from battle-scape into sanctuary for endangered wildlife.

1990
In a suburb in Northern Virginia, an American girl of Korean descent writes in her secret journal: "Dear North Korea. Why do you exist?"

1994
"The Secret of Frequency A" relates the discovery by elite DPRK scientists of a phenomenon engineered by Americans to subjugate North Korea and its allies. According to the DPRK scientists, a mysterious aircraft seen flying over an unnamed African country has been emitting a sinister acoustic frequency responsible for recent environmental disasters in the country's nature preserve. The scientists warn that unless the problem of "Frequency A" is resolved soon, countless species will succumb to "Frequency A"'s insidious effects.

1996
Catastrophic famine continues to decimate the North Korean people while Kim Jong-il resides in opulent mansions and feasts on exotic cuisine.

Juche/86
North Korea introduces a new calendar. The year of Kim Il-sung's birth is retroactively set as Juche/1.

1998
Kim Il-sung posthumously ascends to the role of Eternal President of the Republic.

1999
In the DMZ, a wildflower blossoms through the crack in a rusted helmet.

2000
Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig depict a surreal land paralyzed by illusions and fear in *North Korea through the Looking Glass.*

06/2000
The Economist publishes "Greetings, Earthlings," a cover story framing Kim Jong-il as an otherworldly target of ridicule.

2003
A conference meets in New York City to discuss the importance of the DMZ as a haven for rare and globally significant species.

2004
David Mitchell publishes *Cloud Atlas,* a novel that describes a future in which South Korean hyper-capitalism and North Korean totalitarianism have merged to form a dystopia called "Nea So Copros." Among those abused by this regime: an underclass of humanoid artifacts treated as disposable objects and literally brainwashed by edible "soap."

2007
Crytek releases *Crysis*. Those who enter this virtual reality find themselves in the year 2020. Here they must battle space aliens and North Korean enemy forces.

2008
The Economist reports that most South Koreans regard North Koreans as extraterrestrials.

Juche/98
Cataclysm introduces Dustin Kwon. Since childhood, Kwon has been subjected against his will to North Korean nanotech experimentation. Although the nanites that saturate his body give him heightened abilities, Kwon is also susceptible to cellular deterioration that the nanites can repair only by decomposing other humans' flesh.

2009
A South Korean couple spends so much time online attending to their virtual child that their flesh-and-blood infant starves to death.

Juche/99
Former DPRK propaganda artist Song Byeok daringly exposes Kim Jong-il in a portrait titled "Take Off Your Clothes." Painting the repressive dictator as Marilyn Monroe's character in *The Seven Year Itch*—a film that came out during the decade of the Korean War, a decade when North Korea's most notorious cinephile was coming of age—Song Byeok provides a snapshot from an eccentric counterfactual timeline where the Korean War never happened, where the DMZ has no existence, and where a movie-lover named Kim Jong-il achieves his dream of becoming a glamorous Hollywood star.

2011
Along the southern edge of the DMZ, gift shops sell keychains, T-shirts, and other DMZ kitsch. Infiltration tunnels have been Disneyfied into theme rides.

2011
Two schoolgirls, one North Korean, the other South Korean, walk side-by-side while laughing over a shared joke. Yet such

initial impressions of the image — a painting titled "Bring" by former North Korean propaganda artist Sun Mu — are quickly modified by closer inspection. The schoolgirl whose uniform initially marks her as North Korean is holding a cup of Starbucks coffee, and she seems completely at ease while conversing with her companion, whose hair is adorned by a baseball cap and whose t-shirt is layered over a torn denim miniskirt. Is the DPRK uniform a fashion statement in a futuristic world where the DPRK no longer exists? Where exactly are they walking? The pale background offers no clues. Perhaps the two schoolgirls are figures from an unspecified future walking home from school in a reunified Korea. Or perhaps they live in a future US where the phrase "Korean American" has been superseded by "American of South/North Korean descent." Perhaps "Bring" depicts Korea's future as having "defected" from today's reality of a divided peninsula to the prospect of a reunified Korea and/or a United States where Americans of South and North Korean descent attend the same schools and enjoy the same freedom of expression.

2011

Kaos releases *Homefront*. Those who enter this virtual reality find themselves in the year 2027, two years into the North Korean occupation of the United States. Now called "New Korean Federation of Occupied America," the US is bisected by a Mississippi River poisoned by North Koreans with radioactive iodine.

12/2011

In a glass casket surrounded by snow-white chrysanthemums and blood-red "kimjongilia," a genocidal dictator's corpse apparently awaits a fairytale ending.

2/2014
Satellite images of the Korean peninsula at night continue to reveal a stark contrast between the two Koreas. Time is still frozen in the DPRK, which remains obscure. ROK shimmers with artificial illumination.

Juche/103
The Ryugyong Hotel remains incomplete. The Forgotten War abides.

2017
Korea remains divided.

2019
An aunt who has never met her Korean American niece remains somewhere in North Korea, probably no longer alive, lost forever to her family of origin, from whom she was separated by the war.

2020
Korea remains divided.

2024
The Juche calendar is rumored to have fallen out of use in North Korea.

2025
Korea remains divided.

Juche/____?
The voice of the Korean DMZ is heard (by whom? — this remains a mystery):

> *I was conceived by two young men in August 1945 in Washington, DC, in the Executive Office Building next to the White House. It was late at night on the East Coast of the United States. (It was daytime in Korea.) The Second World War was ending. My fathers, Charles Bonesteel and Dean Rusk, had little time to do what they were instructed to do. They conceived me in the image of symmetry. They followed the 38th parallel. They did not think that I would see the light of day.*
>
> *Approximately eight years later and half a planet away from the site of my conception, I was born on a battered peninsula on July 27, 1953.*
>
> *Although I had been conceived as a straight line, I came into the world as something endowed with more than one dimension. From the sky, fully grown, freshly materialized, 4 kilometers wide, 248 kilometers long, I resembled a sinuous gash in a body already bleeding and bruised. Thus a proxy war reached stalemate in my form.*
>
> *Over the decades I have lived with the fact that my birth divided what was once a unified country. I have come to accept that my flesh is entumored with landmines. They are maladies I inherited from my numerous human progenitors. So too are the skirmishes that erupt like flare-ups of chronic illness, as well as the amnesia (Did the war even happen? The war is forgotten… Is it still happening?), the edifices that have appeared or disappeared across my body, the tunnels of incursion, the fear and the stress, and the slowly rusting weapons from which Korean-bound han syndrome seeps into my arteries. Since I am rooted here, I cannot escape the pain.*

What has kept me alive: wildlife. Slowly at first and then more steadily: Blackberry-lily, milkweed, touch-me-not, cocklebur, red-crowned crane, white-naped crane, long-tailed goral, crested duck, moon bear, fanged musk deer, hoopoe, wild boar, otter, neptis philyra…

Wildflowers growing through cracks in what used to be somebody's helmet.

Life. Lives.

So much new life—too much of it endangered—finds refuge in my estuaries, mountains, wetlands, meadows.

It is on behalf of this life, these lives, that I ask you to prevent more war from ravaging the Korean Peninsula.

Corporations have rights that I, the Korean demilitarized zone, do not have.

I, too, wish to be treated as a person.

Like the Whanganui River in New Zealand, which in March 2017 was recognized as a living entity with its own legal personality, I am an animate and indivisible whole.

Unlike the Whanganui River, I am not yet a tribal ancestor, but if today I am recognized as a person with the right to live free from nuclear destruction and other instances of human brutality, then perhaps I will exist long enough to become a spiritual ancestor thriving alongside my descendants—flora, fauna, human, humanoid…

If I am annihilated by more war on the Korean Peninsula, or if capitalists someday replace me with luxury golf courses, the

wild tiger rumored to have found sanctuary in my ecosystems will remain a rumor and nothing more.

Whether we have a future depends on whether you can hear my voice.

Will you speak and act on my behalf?

(Image description: A blank space that has been crossed out.)

INTERLUDE

Trip

Since yesterday I've been staying at an Airbnb in a town in North Korea. The house belongs to a woman whose features blur and warp no matter how closely together our faces hover. "You're blurry too," she points out, and I don't need to see myself to believe her. Somehow I am aware that, in this world, access to sight is restricted.

"But I forget why I'm here," I say after a breakfast of kimchi petals, and she laughs: "To visit the city at the bottom of the heavenly lake, remember? The lake atop the volcanic mountain? You were so excited." When I ask, "Why was I excited?" she says: "I thought you knew. Your father's sister, the one who disappeared after the war, she lives in that city. You need her DNA for new contact lenses."

For a while we sit in silence sipping chromosome wine. The taste is four-dimensional. My throat fills with time. My spine becomes a thermometer of growing bewilderment. I don't remember signing up for this trip. How did I travel to North Korea? I begin to wonder if access to memory here is restricted too.

The last thing I recall before waking up is my voice insisting, "The city at the bottom of the volcanic lake is a cemetery, isn't it. I don't need new contact lenses. I don't need my aunt's DNA. Who are you? Tell me who you are. You're somebody important, aren't you. Tell me the truth. Tell me everything. Are you her daughter? I also am a daughter. We have so much to discuss. I have so much to tell you. Please. Please. *Before this Airbnb expires.* We both need to know."

You can't see it yet but
through this page
the Korean DMZ
is staring directly at you
from futures near and far

Dream Life of Waste: Fugues in the Key of Capitalism (entries organized in chronological order by date of obsolescence)

The past is still here. It's just not very evenly distributed.
— Corollary to a saying attributed to William Gibson

Expiration dates are units of nostalgia, elegies for the future.
— Ancient proverb

Somehow I must throw these things away.
— Journal entry from July 2019

* * *

- Expiration date: February 2015
- Expired product: Chloraseptic Sore Throat Lozenges
- Journal entry from February 2015:

I love spoilers. I am obsessed with expiration dates. Time is a linear arrow. How are those three sentences interrelated?

("You will probably have trouble remembering events that occurred before treatment began. It will be difficult for you to remember things in the weeks or months leading up to treatment. Some patients have problems with memories from previous years too. You will also have trouble remembering events that happened during the weeks of your treatment.")

This place is full of kipple. For example: three copies of *Paradise Lost.* Five identical black dresses. Countless scarves. Dust, dust, dust. Unopened cans of soup that expired years ago. (I think I'll eat them anyway.) Unopened tubes of Neosporin that say "use by 2011/7." (I think I'll use them anyway.) There was a time when 2011 seemed like the far future: science-fictional, unimaginable. Yet here we are: 2015.

I write this on my phone because at the moment my computer isn't working. I've had the computer since 2010(?). I've had this smartphone (my first) since 2012. I've had my TV since August 2001. Some part of me is reluctant to let go of technology that still functions — no matter how antiquated my machines may seem to other people. (To purchase the latest gadgetry the last person I often am.) Thus I hold on to my computer even though at times it inexplicably blacks out and swallows up my precious data.

I have measured out my life not with coffee spoons but in units of displacement: today's date minus the expiration date of an obsolete product.

It's one thing to say goodbye. It's another thing to log off. It's another thing to enter the witness protection program. It's another thing to fall asleep. It's another thing never to wake up.

Why am I haunted by works of art in which painters find themselves inside their own paintings, or novelists find themselves

inside their own novels, or sculptors find themselves locked into postures of graceful design?

I wonder if non-humans are haunted by similar thoughts.

I wonder if the torpedo fish is capable of administering electro-convulsive therapy to itself.

Spoiler: Treatment isn't scheduled to start until the semester ends, but I am practicing mentally losing whatever it is that I will lose. Goodbye, old brain. Let's be as unsentimental as possible. You knew this day would come. The kipple levels are rising. The expiration dates are expiring. The machines you love are dying. Thank you for your service.

* * *

- Expiration date: June 2015
- Expired product: Hydratensive Healing Lotion
- Journal entry from June 2015:

Nothing hurt, and everything had the quality of a dream. For example, I found myself in a staring contest with a machine. We were alone, the two of us, in an otherwise mostly empty room. I had already examined the anatomy charts on the walls and found a comfortable place to sit as I waited for the doctor to arrive. Left with little else to do, I initiated a staring match with a machine. (It was only natural.) The machine won, of course, so I took a photo of it. Then the doctor arrived, and soon there were sticky (honey?) patches of bumblebee voltage stinging different parts of my body. It was fun! From a distance I watched my arms kick the air involuntarily. My love for onomatopoeia deepened and I discovered a new appreciation for the letter "Z." ("Zap.") Even more fascinating: the itsy bitsy musical needles that, from within my flesh, played the tune of nerves buzzing and crackling. A ghostly soundtrack. Jagged, alien, chaotic. And

the neurologist's final gift: an ultrasound of my head and neck. "As long as they're healthy," I thought to myself, my mind drifting to the image of ocean waves. Those events happened in a state of suspension, the way so many tests seem to happen. Outside, by contrast, was a radiant awakeness. I literally stumbled and found that I was kneeling at the door of TENDER BUTTONS. Is sugar a vegetable? "Are you okay?" someone asked, and the first words out of my mouth were: "I'm worried about the BUTTONS. Are the BUTTONS okay?" They were, and so was I. Tender, I suppose, are the buttons. Tender are the nerves. Tender are the nations. Tender is the earth. I'm falling asleep from the dream of today. Or maybe I'm about to wake up —

* * *

- Expiration date: December 2015
- Expired product: Twelve unopened soda cans in the kitchen cabinet from various delivery places. (I never ordered them — they were always complimentary — and I never felt like drinking them. Thus they found themselves sitting past expiration in rainbow limbo: red Coca Cola, orange Sunkist, yellow-green Sprite, indigo Pepsi…)
- Journal entry from December 2015:

A Syllabus for Lyric, which is a pseudonym

REQUIREMENTS:

- yellow-orange construction paper so bright the hues will blind most eyes
- unconscious knowledge of the color turquoise and its many depths
- too much empathy
- hybrid metal
- nerves that feel more pain than pleasure
- exactly one smile
- motherboard
- zeroer and zeroer fucks left to give

- a country in Asia
- strange little seeds found inside a garage
- politics (because otherwise)
- timepieces that die easily
- asterisk skies
- Perse'phone

POLICY FOR BELATEDNESS:

- Time is what hurts.
- Expiration dates will give structure to your anxiety, especially when you live past the expiration date that was given to you by your earlier selves.
- You will try to counter-outlive your expiration date many times. You will be terrified of both succeeding and failing at your efforts.
- Eternity is what promises.

Assignment: Memorize page 1 without remembering having read it in the first place.

Look at page 1 and feel startled by what you have forgotten: the size of the page, the vibrating blues that bleed on the verge of scarlet fever, the shadows falling on the page, and your own inability to turn around to face the sources you are asked to cite.

Turn to page x. Fall in love with the woman who stands before you and whose likeness somehow finds itself on that very page. Identify the woman, spend time with her, let her spend time with you, risk that rush of raw chemicals, question each other for days and then weeks and then months and then years until the answers to the test grow together into a living nerve, a living dendrite, only ultimately to relinquish this same woman to someone else without truly knowing how she feels about the relinquishment.

Break. Write a customer review about it.

Find yourself in a car that you are not driving. The man driving the car is saying "… and you didn't even want…"

Let the injured denim lie, sleeping, unconscious, mis-buttoned, fraying. Let the years pass by.

Find receipts. "So many, so many, my god so many receipts..."

Build a robot.

Instruct the robot to construct a terrarium out of ingredients of the robot's choosing.

Give the robot what it wants:
your life.
Only your life.
Which is everything, but just literally.
Let the rest grow.

* * *

- Expiration date: May 2016
- Expired product: Neutrogena sunscreen
- Journal entry from May 2016:

To understand agoraphobia, imagine a leash connecting two entities: (1) a terrified rescue dog and (2) a human trying to coax the fearful dog into crossing the threshold between indoors and outside.

I am the human. I am the leash. I am the dog.

I am the agoraphobe.

Come on, let's go outside, the world is safe, people are good, nothing bad will happen. It's okay, you can do it.

Yesterday, for the first time in a long time, I left my apartment building and took a walk by myself in the dark.

I managed to walk my body downstairs and through the front door and into the warm night.

Outside was an ample rush of happening. Overheard: a woman on the phone urgently urging in a language not English. Overheard overhead: the roar of a jet plane taking off from La Guardia Airport. Oversmelled: nicotine from teenagers smoking, languidly conversing in Korean. Overglanced: people of all ages standing in clusters staring down at their screens. Overwhelmed: a dog being walked by a human, the human wondering "Am I a peripheral character in a rough draft of a William Gibson novel right now?" and the dog wondering, "Why are there so many dead branches and stray vines? Why do so many faces look sad? Downtown Flushing in Queens is illegible to me at this moment in the oceanic river of time. Will I drown? I can't read the signs. But maybe that's because I'm a dog. Not even a real dog. Metaphor dog. Does this metaphor for agoraphobia make sense? Is the world safe? We might be safe. Safe enough for tonight. The leash is telling me: Keep walking. Walk. Trust that it's good for you. Walk."

* * *

- Expiration date: November 2016
- Expired product: Butternut squash soup
- Journal entry from November 2016:

In my dream, I am a whale floating inside the ocean. Suddenly I hear the Korean DMZ and the Mexico–US border singing to each other — It is an eerie song. I wake up in a trance. Are these wires in my head, or are they geodetic lines? Or perhaps: roots, stems, vines —

* * *

- Expiration date: January 2017
- Expired product: Purpose cleansing wash
- Journal entry from January 2017:

– I don't understand the world.
– I am a Jennie-shaped bundle of preexisting conditions.
– I feel so much inexpressible love for so many human beings.
– My preexisting conditions preceded even my conception. For example: postmemory, vivid images coiled in DNA. So much history.
– I'm sitting here by myself in an apartment in Flushing, NY. It's evening. I just did some paperwork. I can feel my brain start to fall asleep. I feel vulnerable. I feel alive. I feel calm, drowsy, and entirely in awe of all the scales of reality.
– I want to remember this moment.

* * *

- Expiration date: September 2017
- Expired product: can of tuna fish
- Journal entry from September 2017:

Finished writing something that I will probably call "A Refuge for the Blazonaut." Or maybe I will call it "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe." I wrote most of it on my smartphone. I showed the latest version to X and Y. They did not know how to respond. I cannot help but feel devastated by their confusion.

* * *

- Expiration date: July 2018
- Expired product: Anbesol Oral Anesthetic
- Journal entry from July 2018:

Once, while visiting you, I woke up in the middle of the night to find you lying next to me. Our heads were facing each other on the same pillow. Your eyes were luminous, round, alert. You were watching me with such focus, such intricate uncanny sentience, that I was moved almost to tears. "What is it? What are you trying to tell me?" I whispered. And in that moonlit room you lifted your head, looked away from me, looked back at me, murmured "oo'weu'!," placed your body closer to mine, pressed your body against mine, and shared a sigh that sounded minutes deep.

Still I don't know who you were to me. Nephew, sibling, friend, oppa, great grandfather? All of the above. None of the above. More.

You were our first. "It's like we're more American now," my mother said. "Especially since he's a beagle. An American dog."

Personally I think you were Korean American. The first time I saw you eat, you were being fed freshly cooked Korean bulgogi and kalbi by my Korean mother's adoring hand. I swear I saw your eyes turn into the Hangul word for love.

We did not anticipate the full shape and size of your genius and generosity. The way, for example, you effortlessly reunified four members of a family by becoming the beloved fifth member. The way you performed comedy for us and made us laugh. The way you gave me and my mother something about which—someone about whom—to gossip lovingly and worry together. The way you showed me, especially over the past few years, how my brother's capacity for love, responsibility, and sacrifice is heroic.

There's so much else—I remember how yoga came so naturally to you; and I vividly remember how, after baths, you would run around indoors like a race car, your speed and precision together a marvel to witness; I remember your exquisite ears and dear eyelashes; and I and

Calvin Chu (February 2003–July 2018)

* * *

- Expiration date: August 2018
- Expired product: XXXX credit card
- Journal entry from August 2018:

I vowed never to turn into my mother. Yet this morning my rage made me strong enough to lacerate a yoga mat and punch through my bookshelves in six places. My father stood there in despair like a war orphan, which he literally is, he is a war orphan and it breaks my heart, this war orphan kept begging me, "Please. Hurt *me*, Jennie. Please, hurt *me.*" And I kept shrieking, "Never, never, I refuse to hurt you!" — And then, because I started to remember certain vivid details of what happened to me at Stanford, my rage exploded into violent sobbing and I started pummeling myself. Again. And only then did I feel okay. I felt — connected to my mom. Comforted by my mom.

I vowed never to turn into my rapist professor. Yet the truth is that I tend to take too many intellectual risks. I enjoy exploring the limits of genre and language. I crave intellectual excitement. And I have often felt moved, animated, inspired by my own students. They teach me much more often than I teach them. Isn't that the kind of thing Jay Fliegelman would have said?

My nightmares this morning — the dreams that ignited my fury and self-loathing — were peopled with Avital Ronell, Anthony Bourdain, and Asia Argento. I woke up to the memory of two things Jay said to me back in 2000:

1. That's the thought police, Jennie, and they're coming for you!
2. This feeling dare not speak its name.

Horrified, I —

How many times can a person break.

I don't feel safe teaching. I don't feel safe not teaching. I don't feel safe anywhere. The fallout from my existence is so toxic.

You should be careful. Don't come too close to me.

Fuck

Fuck Stanford, fuck the Stanford English Department, fuck the silencers, fuck precarity, fuck war, fuck trauma, fuck mental illness, fuck coverups, fuck the Catholic Church, fuck Trump, fuck all the rapists and abusers, fuck this pain. Fuck!

How many times can a person break? I don't know.

Maybe the person isn't broken at all.

Maybe reality is broken.

The thought police aren't coming for me.

The thought police have been here all along.

* * *

- Expiration date: June 2019
- Expired product: Maximum Strength Aspercreme with Lidocaine
- Journal entry from June 2019:

My safeword is "capitalism."

Just kidding.

Capitalism! I'm not kidding!

* * *

- Expiration date: July 2019
- Expired product: US Passport
- Journal entry from July 2019:

One year later, I remember my brother calling me from the veterinarian office.

"Here," my brother said softly, holding the phone to Calvin's face. We were using FaceTime.

"Calvin!" I whispered, struggling not to cry, though I knew that by then he had been deaf for many months, so it was pointless for me to say anything.

But he must have sensed my brother's distress, because suddenly I could hear him try to howl.

To this day it haunts me that I added to his discomfort on the day he died.

* * *

- Expiration date: February 2020
- Expired product: Duracell batteries
- Journal entry from February 2020:

THE MISSED CARRIAGE:

> I could not stop — for Motherhood —
> Nor could She stop — for me —

* * *

- Expiration date: October 2021
- Expired product: Organic instant oatmeal

- Journal entry from October 2021:

A video shows what appears to be the decapitated head of a doll.

(The rest of the doll's body is immaterial to this poem.)

The doll's head lies stranded on a sandy beach.

It is approximately the size of a human child's fist.

Its scalp is hairless.

Its plastic skin is pink.

Vacantly its eyes stare.

Vacantly its face smiles.

As you observe the doll's motionless head, you begin to wonder if this video might in fact be a photograph.

Yes, you tell yourself — this is a photograph and not a video.

But suddenly the doll's head moves, as if possessed.

It moves away from the camera, pulled by invisible strings controlled by a phantom puppeteer.

At what point do you realize that the head is being dragged, with purpose and persistence, by a hermit crab who has found a new shell to call home?

Slowly the doll-faced sea creature inches down the small beach and finally into the gray-blue ocean.

Legend has it that the doll's face, submerged underwater, has now come to life.

Legend has it that the doll's eyes are now agape with astonishment.

Only whales can hear the doll's words, which they quote in their songs.

I dreamt I was a twin.

One of us was never born.

Which one of us woke up?

* * *

- Expiration date: March 2022
- Expired product: Duracell batteries
- Journal entry from March 2022:

I don't know why it took me this long to learn about the theory of "maternal impression."

At long last I now understand why my mother is shaped

like war
like the Korean war
like the war during which she was conceived and born
like the mother-shaped war inside my psyche

* * *

- Expiration date: January 2024
- Expired product: TUMS Antacid
- Journal entry from January 2024:

Slowly and with care I let my head slide into the bathwater until fully submerged. I am not suicidal. I am curious. Some distant part of me wants to know: How long until my need to breathe

overwhelms? Zero, I count: 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 38, 38, 38th — until — ellipses…

… I surface elsewhere. I surface in a parallel world. I surface in a place to which only photos and prose have given me access: the Korean DMZ.

Demilitarized for decades; for decades untouched by human beings.

Is it a lake or a marsh whose rich waters almost fully immerse my body?

In any case it is alive with fish, turtles, mallards, otters. A newborn deer and her mother watch me carefully. White-naped cranes fly overhead.

As I run my fingers through my dripping hair, orange-red blackberry-lilies fall onto my shoulders. Somehow I can tell they originated in the tissues of my own flesh.

For how long has my head been growing such blossoms?

Notice these arms, these hands. The skin has begun to develop velvet verdant stripes. Clouds drift: sunlight drenches, a downpour. This is how photosynthesis feels. As if warmth were a color. As if color were blood itself. New leaves germinate from former extremities. Former extremities retreat and disappear.

Something else has begun to narrate consciousness. Through neural systems nonhuman: premonition. An entity that doesn't belong here will soon descend and join our midst.

What will it be?

A missile?

A robot?

An asteroid?

Or will it be — has it all this time already been — "me"?

* * *

- Expiration date: April 2030
- Expired product: Acuvue contact lenses
- Journal entry:

  Vision ~~will~~ ~~may~~ must happen

Expiration date for this blank space: Juche 100,000

~~Due dates for what could have been:~~

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

The Mist Carriage: An Error (2020)

—

1

I don't know how
to feel about this [redacted] I didn't know I
wanted or deserved until
these vivid dreams, this
tender flesh

2

Can you hear the news?
(The world is burning)
(The world is falling apart)
Dear you somehow existing under
a heart that feels
like it is shifting
like it is breaking
I apologize if you are born

~~I apologize if you are not~~

~~3~~
~~Through your still-innocent blood blood capital already flows like the Amazon~~

~~4~~
~~It astonishes me that you are constantly unfolding in space and time~~
~~(then again so am I and so are we all possibilities crisscrossing and/or crossroading in you and /or in us)~~

~~5~~
~~(They say you are starving)~~
~~(They say you refuse)~~

~~6~~
~~.~~

~~7~~

8

For a brief moment in time I was perhaps almost a mother.

9
I planted your lung
and its breath grew like a tree,
echoes of ghostly timelines ramifying
in search of their origin.

I planted your tongue
and its roots sank underground,
unconscious systems seeking
land to call home.

Now I plant here a song.
These are the lyrics.
May the melody reach you,
may it bloom into textures that resonate
even in you
who never knew my voice
and whose voice I will never know.

10
A child I do not recognize — a child-shaped shimmer; a bright mutation untraveling a line in the fabric of reality — insists on accompanying me wherever I go.

"You are my mother," the child states.

"I don't have any children," I reply, "but let's find your parents, okay?"

The shimmer does not answer.

The shimmer shimmers—cursive, active, daring, free.

"Shimmer," I call, "Do not break that toy. Do not climb that tree. Do not draw on that wall. Do not talk to that stranger. Do not pick up that shard of glass. Shimmer, shimmer."

Shimmer shimmers. For many dreamhours, shimmering happens. I follow like an echo.

Ultimately, of course, I cannot stop Shimmer from taking the one risk that will be our last: Shimmer looks into the shard of mirrorglass — the shard I said not to pick up — and in that moment of reflection we are both electrified with disappointment.

We see.

"Okay," Shimmer says, staring into the broken mirror: "Goodbye, Seo-Young."

The flawlessness of the child's pronunciation is neither startling nor expected. Yet it sends a sword through my lungs.

I don't respond. Not aloud. Departures and arrivals make me uneasy. Quietly I watch the shimmer subside into a vibrant scar in space and time.

When I wake up, I will be a cliché. I will be a slightly lonely woman who has sometimes wondered about what might have been. I will be a cheerful, defiant, bossy child who has turned into a not-quite-cheerful, not-quite-defiant, not-quite-bossy woman. I will be the mother I never knew I had. I will be an untranslated daughter. Perhaps I will let myself cry for a minute. I will be a vague pronoun, a grammatical error. I will be okay. I will be exactly okay.

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This is a page that holds space

RE TURN

SHIFT

UNDERLINE THE CORRECT ANSWER

Sometimes "subjects" need suddenly to

1. be changed
2. change themselves
3. change ourselves

INTERLUDE

Welcome to the Vegas Pyongyang

… The next day, departing McCarran International (itself an extension of the Strip), I fell asleep during takeoff and dreamed of a spectral addition to Las Vegas's cityscape: a replica of the 105-story Ryugyong. Located in the capital of what is arguably the world's last communist state, Pyongyang's "Hotel of Doom" (additional epithets: "Death Star," "Ghostscraper") is strikingly evocative of an alien rocketship. In my dream, Ryugyong's silhouette was eerily at home among the Stratosphere, "Camelot," Luxor Pyramid, "Eiffel Tower," and other landmarks anthologized in the skyline's eclectic jumble of icons. At the hotel's entrance stood female traffic "greeters" chiming "Welcome to The Vegas Pyongyang!" while directing visitors with flawlessly choreographed precision. Inside: everywhere an ambiance of simulated luxury and dissonant facades. Portraits glorifying "Dear Leader" adorned the walls of Starbucks. Billboards advertised the hotel's signature spectacle: "Arirang Mass Gymnastics!" Lurid murals depicted meadows of Kimilsungia and Kimjongilia strewn with corpses of "Defeated US Imperialists!" alongside the flowers' namesakes picnicking on sashimi and Hennessy Cognac atop Baekdu-san. Giftshops sold gilt-framed night-satellite images of Korea: radiant North; lightless South. Restaurants had names like "Juche" and "38" — the latter featur-

ing hidden washroom "stalls" whose doors, when decrypted, opened secret stairwells. Dimly lit steps cascaded from landing to landing before turning into subterranean mazes infiltrating borderline darkness. Tunnels of increasing brightness eventually led to "Underground Economy," an immense and richly appointed casino indistinguishable from most Vegas casinos. But "Underground Economy" was a front for another kind of black market. Here, one could send to North Korea supplies guaranteed to reach those truly in need. Here, one could trade uncensored photographs and first-hand accounts documenting North Korean reality. Here, one could receive messages from long-lost relatives…

Insert another DMZ here

Imagining an Asian American ~~Superhero~~ of North Korean Origin: Fantasias and Fugues in the Key of Hope

> "The future of Asian American literature must include superhero protagonists of North Korean descent."
>
> — Proverb

This piece, a thought-experimental blend of literary criticism and speculative "design fiction," will introduce you to an Asian American ~~superhero~~ of North Korean origin. In this science-fictional ~~superhero~~, whom I have tentatively named "구름"/"☁"/"Ku-reum,"[1] Korea's elusive realities coalesce into legible form. More specifically, they become available for narrative experience and relatable to us as an anthropomorphic character, a person with whom we might identify, come face-to-face, sympathize, interact dynamically, and have a conversation. Ku-reum is designed to reflect Korea's complex past and hopes for the future. Existing beyond division systems, Ku-reum uses the

1 The "R" in Ku-reum's name is not case-sensitive.

non-binary pronouns "one/they." Neither "South" nor "North," neither "East" nor "West," Ku-reum transcends the four cardinal directions. (Magnetic compasses break down in one's/their presence.) While genetically related to the South Korean Marvel ~~superheroes~~ Taegukgi and Ami Han/White Fox (among others), Ku-reum is unique. One's/their superpowers — in which Korean shamanism and geomancy are enhanced by cutting-edge technologies and complicated by vulnerabilities such as Americanized han — include time travel, self-cloning, telepathy, the ability to choreograph the flow of 기, the ability to channel hwabyung into creative energy and cathartic release, and the ability to bend the 38th parallel. Superpowered characters like Ku-reum can be designed and "tried on" as if they were prosthetic suits or exoskeletons that extend the human sensorium and mobilize our sense of agency. To "try on" such exoskeletons is to experiment with new ways of navigating through and actively participating in Korea's cognitively estranging pasts, presents, and futures.

MASK
Most of the left half of one's/their face is covered by a birthmark.

In hue this birthmark is deep lavender — the lavender that results when the colors of the US flag are mixed together.

In shape the birthmark resembles the outline of the Korean Peninsula.

The features of one's/their face are East Asian. One's/their hairline, for instance, follows the path of the Amnok/Yalu River, the stream of water that currently separates China from North Korea. One's/their jawline, meanwhile, corresponds roughly to the southernmost jawline of the South Korean coast. And one's/their neck is adorned with the island of Jeju.

Thus the lines of one's/their face and neck evoke geomantic concepts.

By design and in effect, the birthmark is a mask — a camouflage.

Its lavender geographies become visible only when one's/their body senses that disguise is necessary.

(Or perhaps it is when the birthmark cannot be seen — when, in other words, one's/their skin seems "normal" — that one/they wear one's/their true disguise.)

NAME
구름. Romanization: Ku-Reum.

One/they were named after the Korean word for "cloud." Little did one's/their parents know that their child would later become a ~~superhero~~ with the ability to take on the qualities of condensed vapor drifting — suspended — in our planet's air.

OCCUPATION
By "day" (one's/their local time zone, wherever one/they may be at the moment) one/they is a spy, a double agent.

At "night" (Earth Standard Time) one's/their agency becomes much more than double.

THEME SONG
The frequencies at which the ecosystems of the Korean Demilitarized Zone vibrate.

BIRTHPLACE
One/they were born in Pyongyang.

No — one/they were born in Kwalliso Number 22, the infamous North Korean prison also known as Hoeryong Concentration Camp.

Or maybe one/they were born in a rural North Korean village. This village is so obscure that its name cannot be found on maps. One's/their parents worked in rice fields. So did one/they.

Or maybe one/they emerged mysteriously fully grown from the waters of Lake Chon (Heaven Lake), the crater lake in the caldera at the top of the sacred volcano Mount Paektu in Yanggang-do —

— but one/they are not a goddess. Like Donna Haraway, one/they would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.

Pyongyang. Let one/them be born in Pyongyang. This city — its name — will be recognizable to most people.

In a way, one/they are also being born right now in our minds.

HEREDITARY INFORMATION (MASSIVELY INCOMPLETE)
One's/their "DNA" is so complex that it cannot be visualized as a two-dimensional "pie chart." Picture Ku-Reum's ancestry as a shivering, shimmering, prismatic, translucent sphere. This "sphere" defies straightforward "pie-charting."

One's/their "near" relatives include (select five from the following options):

[ ] Aeon Flux (a futuristic spy living in a divided future, first conceptualized by the Korean American animator Peter Chung);

[ ] Ami Han / White Fox (Marvel's first South Korean ~~superhero~~);
[ ] Ahn Kwang-jo (the border-crossing North Korean-and-Chinese "Aquaman" of DC Comics);
[ ] Dustin Kwon (a ~~superhero~~ conceptualized by Yul Kwon as an unwilling test subject for North Korean scientists who have saturated his body with potent nanites);
[ ] Henry Park (the melancholy Korean American spy who narrates Chang-Rae Lee's 1995 novel *Native Speaker*);
[ ] Inspector O (the North Korean protagonist of James Church's Inspector O mystery series, written by a former intelligence officer);
[ ] Jang Jin-Sung (the author of *Dear Leader: My Escape From North Korea*);
[ ] Janice Lee (a Korean American author whose work in shamanic healing informs their brilliant writing);
[ ] kimilsungia and kimjongilia (flowers designed and bred with their namesakes in mind);
[ ] Lee Myung-hyun / Lee Bang-hee (the tragically tormented double agent at the center of the 2002 South Korean film *Swiri*);
[ ] Miss DMZ (the mysterious elusive woman who lives in the surreal duty-free casino beneath the Korean demilitarized zone in Young Hae Chang Heavy Industries's digital narrative);
[ ] Spider Lim (a minor fictional character of Korean descent gifted with an exquisite capacity for communing with technology in Richard Powers's long hymn to virtual reality *Plowing the Dark*);
[ ] Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (the author of the iconic Korean American poem-memoir *DICTEE*);
[ ] the creature at the center of the North Korean kaiju movie *Pulgasari*;
[ ] the former North Korean propaganda painters Sun Mu and Song Byeok (each of whom now creates post-DPRK art unique in style and full of feeling, from homesickness and alienation to hope);

[ ] the Historian and the Guide (both of whom are narrators and main characters in Cathy Park Hong's dystopian verse-novel *Dance Dance Revolution*);
[ ] the lyric speakers of Don Mee Choi's transcendent poem-artwork *DMZ COLONY*;
[ ] the marvelous 해녀/haenyeo (real-life female divers of Jeju Island who can hold their breaths for near-superhuman amounts of time while browsing and harvesting underwater);
[ ] the myriad characters who populate *The Accusation: Forbidden Stories from Inside North Korea* (by the North Korean author whose pseudonym, Bandi, means firefly in Korean);
[ ] the real-life volunteers and workers for the organization Liberty in North Korea;
[ ] Yeong-hye (the mentally ill fantasist protagonist of Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian,* who succeeds in transforming herself from a meat-eating mammal to posthuman vegetation);
[ ] Young-ha Kim (the South Korean author of haunting turn-of-the-millennium novels such as *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* and *Your Republic Is Calling You*);
[ ] Zao (a violently uncanny North Korean villain in the James Bond film *Die Another Day,* whose DNA overlaps with that of our subject insofar as one/they too are made out of how North Korea has been misperceived by outsiders).

HEREDITARY INFORMATION, continued (STILL INCOMPLETE)
Less direct relatives — whose literary, cultural, and spiritual DNA resonate obliquely with the DNA of our ~~superhero~~ — include (select five from the following options):

[ ] all of the clones of the TV series *Orphan Black*;

[ ] Area X (the wild, luxuriant, prodigious, horrifying, gorgeous main character of Jeff Vandermeer's Southern Reach Trilogy);
[ ] Daisy Johnson (a Marvel ~~superhero~~, also known as Skye, also known as Quake, whose abilities include the power to generate powerful vibrations);
[ ] Elaine Scarry (whose revelatory scholarship juxtaposes torture with beauty, war with flowers);
[ ] Emily Dickinson;
[ ] Frankenstein's creature (the man-made humanoid artifact brought to life by Mary Shelley in her 1818 novel);
[ ] Harriet Tubman (abolitionist, spy for the US Army, genius of the Underground Railroad);
[ ] Katniss Everdeen (the quiet, rebellious protagonist of the dystopian Hunger Games series);
[ ] Lidia Yuknavitch (whose intense lyricism and fluidly nonlinear storytelling have inspired many memoir-writers, including this one);
[ ] Ororo Iquadi T'Challa (also known as Storm, one of the science-fictional X-Men mutants);
[ ] red-crowned cranes;
[ ] Shakespeare's sister (an imaginary young woman, doomed by sexism to die in her brother's shadow, whose resurrection at the end of Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* is left to the reader's own imagination);
[ ] Ted Chiang's heptapods (extraterrestrial creatures whose shockingly beautiful language and concept of time differ movingly from those of human beings);
[ ] the Coatlicue that richly informs Gloria Anzaldúa's lyric work of literary theory and memoir *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*;
[ ] the eponym of William Gibson's science-fictional novel *Idoru* (a virtual entity who alters the status and state of her reality);
[ ] the literary character Oryx (whose mystique, exoticism, and Asian features imbue Margaret Atwood's post-apocalyptic novel *Oryx and Crake* with an aura of orientalism);

[ ] the Oankali ooloi (charismatic tentacled aliens, genetic traders and engineers, who colonize planet Earth and reproduce with humans in Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis Trilogy);
[ ] the octopuses and squids of Earth whose ingenuity and fluency in genetics are astonishing.

EARLY LIFE

Like so many other North Koreans who live in the capital city of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Ku-Reum was born to an elite family.

One/they were born at some point during the last two decades of the twentieth century.

One/they had a sibling whom one/they adored. No amount of soju or therapy or torture will get one/them to talk about one's/their sibling.

One's/their parents might or might not have noticed that as a child Ku-Reum had a subtle talent for seeming to be elsewhere and yet fully present, for quietly removing oneself/themself from difficult situations, and for greeting foreign tourists with an exquisite (strategic) mix of cutting-edge politeness and calm curiosity.

One's/their youth was short-lived. At some point in one's/their young adulthood,

(A) a chance encounter with a radioactive substance activated one's/their superpowers;
(B) a leaflet drifted down from the skies, floated onto one's/their palms, and awakened one's/their consciousness to the suffering inflicted by the Kim regime upon millions of North Korean people, thereby activating one's/their superpowers;

(C) the devastating sight of one's/their beloved best friend starving to death activated one's/their superpowers;
(D) the unruly fact of one's/their existence was discovered by Kim Jong-il and/or Kim Jong-un, who vowed to extinguish Ku-Reum's bloodline. Ku-reum and one's/their family were imprisoned in a camp where Ku-Reum's parents and sibling were tortured and where Ku-Reum was subjected to medical experiments;
(E) All of the above and more.

FAVORITE MOVIE
The 2006 South Korean film *I'm A Cyborg, But That's Okay,* directed by Park Chan-wook.

Sometimes dismissed as a "pointless" romantic comedy set in a psychiatric ward, the film makes more sense when it is viewed as a way of thinking through the pathos and pathology of division.

The main character of the movie is a young patient named Young-goon who is charged with radioactive portent and fueled by fantasies of mass destruction. She has been reduced to nearly skeletal form by her conviction that she is a robot who must feed not on food but on electricity and nuclear energy. Haunted by memories of a divided family, she isolates herself from the rest of the psychiatric ward and constructs her own reality — one in which her extremities glow in the dark, her inner organs have been replaced by gears, her mouth and arms discharge bullets, and her fate is to detonate a nuclear bomb.

The situation is neutralized by Young-goon's fellow patient Il-soon, who has fallen in love with her and who is distraught when he sees her skeletal frame for the first time. Instead of scorning her reality, he joins it and carefully renovates it from within: for example, he engineers a whimsical "rice-megatron" that converts rice into electricity, and he convinces Young-goon

to have the "rice-megatron" installed in her spine so that she can start eating again and recover her health.

As the foregoing summary suggests, *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* is a film loaded with details evocative of North Korea: famine-stricken body, obsession with nuclear weaponry, miscommunication, tragic prehistory, ominous future, divided family, self-isolation. Young-goon is a personification (cyborgification?) of North Korea, one whose transformation in the film from weaponized cyborg to healthy cyborg corresponds to a desire to befriend North Korea, to understand its eccentricities, to empathize with it, and to coexist with it peacefully. *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* gently defuses politically fraught issues — e.g., sanctions, nuclear weapons testing, reunification — while reminding us that such issues are sensitive, personal, and even susceptible to happy endings.

SUPERPOWERS

Ku-Reum's superpowers, abilities, tools, and techniques are numerous. They include:

- The ability to invoke the 38th parallel. This line answers Ku-reum's psychic call like a pet. If one/they need a lasso, it will turn into a lasso. If one/they need a net, it will turn into a net. If one/they need a rope, it will turn into a rope. If one/they need a stringed musical instrument, it will turn into the most plangent gayageum ever to bring tears to a dictator's eyes.
- A superhuman psychological fortitude that enables one/them to endure the painful process of escaping and returning to North Korea again and again and again. Ku-reum uses this ability to rescue defectors and refugees and bring them to safety. Harriet Tubman guides one/them through the many long nights.

- An ability (already mentioned above) to take on the qualities of a sentient cloud. This ability, however, one/they must use sparingly or else one/they will be drained of energy and risk one's/their life altogether.
- A capacity to feel and act completely at home in borderlands and ambiguous situations. Ambivalence and dividedness do not immobilize one/them. Instead they galvanize one/them to storytell, shadowbox, and dream one's/their way into instructive paradoxes and luminous perspectives that are irreducibly infinite.
- The ability to become an "inscrutable Asian" when one/they want or need to be inscrutable.
- The ability to "scrute" others.
- The ability to see through propaganda and bullshit of all kinds.
- The ability to think like the Internet.
- Ch'ook ji bop (축지법), an ancient method of compressing space in order to travel long distances in a very brief amount of time.
- A haenyeo (해녀) mutation that enables one/them to spend hours and even days underwater, swimming and exploring, without surfacing for air.
- One's/their own Emily Dickinson version of Juche, the North Korean "ideology" of self-reliance, which enables one/them to spend long periods of time in isolation without needing to surface for the company of other lives.
- The ability to reunify families, a kind of t'ong-il. The Oankali ooloi in one/them compulsively seeks stray members of the same family. Ku-Reum can smell genetic and epigenetic phenomena, hormones, pheromones, yearnings, affinities, memories, the tiniest clues that help one/them to match family members and bring them together.
- A South Korean doppelgänger.
- A command of chi that flows fluently through one/them as Danny Rand's "chi" will never flow through him.
- Inception. One/they visit Kim Jong-un in his dreams. One/they persuade him, little by little. One/they visit others, too.

- The ability to access reality unencumbered by any ideology. Ku-Reum can experience (verb) Experience (noun) unaffected by late capitalism, communism, consumerism. More specifically, one/they can thoroughly grasp any ideology without letting it change the way one/they think, behave, exist.
- A modified hanbok outfit that protects one/them simply by concealing one's/their body, which is bulletproof, covered in retractable tentacles, capable of camouflage, and immune to sexual assault.
- The metafictional knowledge that one/they are an artifact, a literary character. This knowledge (the knowledge that ultimately one/they are "just" fictional) frees one/them to defy gravity, endure pain, and cross the DMZ over and over again.
- The uncanny ability to deescalate crises and to diffuse tensions.
- Han (한) and hwabyung (화병). A culture-specific syndrome linked to Korea's historical traumas, han is a sense of unresolved resentment and unavenged injustice. Hwabyung is what happens when han is activated. In the Korean language, "hwa" is a word for fire and "byung" is a word for illness. Symptoms of this Korean "fire-illness" include insomnia, headache, dyspnea, palpitations of the heart, and a sensation of heat. The scale and intensity of Ku-Reum's own fire-illness reflect generations of oppression, trauma, denial, resentment, guilt, repression, and resignation. Like Mount Paektu, one's/their hwabyung is volcanic. Do not wake up the volcano. Do not weaponize one's/their han and hwabyung. Not yet.
- The ability to select, closely analyze, edit, and use one or more of the many sources that have made one/them who one/they are. (Cf. octopuses and squids who can edit their own genetic code.)

AN EXAMPLE OF ONE'S/THEIR ABILITIES IN ACTION

Consider William Gibson's novel *Idoru*. The following passage has often hovered and rotated in Ku-reum's mind:

> Don't look at the Idoru's face. She is not flesh; she is information. She is the tip of an iceberg, no, an Antarctica, of information. Looking at her face would trigger it again: she was some unthinkable volume of information. She induced the nodal vision in some unprecedented way; she induced narrative. (178)

William Gibson's techno-orientalism makes Ku-Reum profoundly uncomfortable. Yet one/they cannot deny that one/they find this passage useful. When interrogating an enemy, for example, Ku-Reum recalls this passage from *Idoru*. One/they tell one's/their enemy: "Look closely at my face." And then one/they channel the sublime figure Gibson describes. The nodal vision. The tip of the epistemological Antarctica. And like the Idoru, one/they induce cascades of narrative (confessions, critical information, names, dates) and add them to one's/their already unthinkable volumes of data.

The following lines from Richard Powers's *Plowing the Dark* have also made an impression on Ku-reum. The narrator describes a character of Korean descent — Spider Lim — whose body is so exquisitely sensitive to technology that he is constantly in danger of merging with it.

> Spider Lim slumped over his workstation in a baby coma. He sat still, intent upon the screen, but dazed. […] All of this virtual country's immigrants tended to maze out on silicon's sub-micron boulevards, tranced over their keyboards, their carpal tunnels hollowed out for maximum brain-finger throughput. But Spider's body tracked the machine especially steeply. He could generally catch himself overheating, hyperventilating as he tested an overclocked processor or a heat-stressed 1C. But a hang could snag him, pull him down under consciousness's event horizon. […]

> Spider waved his hands for peace. No biggie, guys. My Boolean-blood barrier is just a little weak. […]
>
> Spider laughed, one of those single-syllable, apologize-for-existing laughs, still intact from his first few years of Korean existence. […]
>
> Spider Lim, Spiegel said. The man who became his own collision algorithm.
>
> At these words, Lim's whole body blushed so deeply that his bruise vanished into the general background rose. (58–62)

Spider-Man, Ku-reum thought at first upon encountering these lines. The webs this Spider Lim(b) weaves are cyber-, notional, and just as his "Boolean-blood barrier is just a little weak" (according to Spider himself), his brain-web barrier is virtually nonexistent. But why is this Korean American man a minor character in this novel? Why isn't he a ~~superhero~~? I wonder — Is my own Boolean-blood barrier weak? Maybe. Or is my planet-Earth-blood-brain barrier weaker?

One/they happened then to look down at a map of North Korea. One's/their ooloian tentacles surged. A tear drop fell onto the DMZ. At exactly the spot where one's/their tear made contact with the map, the corresponding place on Earth began to grow dark with unforecast rain. Afterward, strange flowers appeared for a day and disappeared as soon as 24 hours had passed. The animals who witnessed this event appreciated that the storm seemed to be taking place virtually as though in a separate dimension. Likewise, the flowers were not even physical — a boar could walk right through them. Their habitat was not disturbed or contaminated.

Even now a Siberian musk deer wades into a river.

THE HOMES THAT HAUNT KU-REUM

Pyongyang, the capital city of North Korea, is a fossilized monument to outdated ideals. The country's first two leaders, Kim il-sung and Kim Jong-il, lie embalmed in lavish still-life crypts. To intervene in this anachronistic developing nation is not only difficult to imagine but fraught with the risk of apocalypse. The regime chronically abuses the threat of nuclear weaponry, among other forms of harm, to hold the people of North Korea, South Korea, and neighboring countries hostage to inertia. Visits by aliens are carefully choreographed by the regime, and rule-breakers are often punished severely. Indeed, human rights violations in North Korea are systemic. Without freedom of information (almost nobody in North Korea, it seems, is allowed to use the global Internet) and without freedom of movement (border crossings by North Korean people are prevented by land mines, soldiers, and the fear of being tortured), North Koreans are virtually powerless to change the circumstances in which they live.

South Korea, by contrast, inhabits a realm so fast-paced and so consumed with hi-tech that citizens have been known to die from pathological videogaming.

Between South and North Korean temporalities there is a mystical rift in time and space. Located in the DMZ, and surrounded by landmines, this rift acts as a portal to other dimensions and timelines.

Few people are capable of accessing the rift without disturbing the land mines.

Ku-Reum is one such person.

DISPATCHES FROM TIME TRAVEL

Ku-Reum wakes up to find oneself/themself in a North Korean prison cell.

One/they must escape.

Without the need for a computer of any kind — after all, Ku-Reum is "Cloud" — one/they commune with the internet and social media.

One/they close one's/their eyes.

One/they post the following stanzas online.

(Prayer)
Let 한 in me grow wild, grow strange
Till "Other" disappear —
Let 화병 every neuron change
Till "Powers" reappear —

(Crash Location)
The Atlas reads: "Our Universe,
Year Juche 2099 —"
My fingers seek: Peninsula —
Instead a Braille of Isles they find —

Where once was Seoul instead is Sea —
Where mountains, Archipelago —
I tear Korea from its Page
And whisper "Time for us to go —"

(Directions)
Futurity: the Iceberg's tip.
To us, its past, It gives command —
"Free from the DMZ your Ship
And past the Solar System land —"

(Destiny)
Uncanny are the valleys —
Uncanny is the surge —
Uncanny this volcanic steam —

From which Ourself emerge —

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(This is a page swarming with invisible characters)

EPILOGUE

Miscellaneous Discussion Questions and Exam Prompts (in no particular order)

* Feel free, but not obligated, to write your name(s) here:
_____
_____
_____
_____

* Which of the following voices could you hear while reading this book?

Voice 1: fire
Voice 2: speculation
Voice 3: prayer
Voice 4: whimsy
Voice 5: nostalgia
Voice 6: surrealism
Voice 7: pure anguish
Voice 8: other: _____

Voice 9: other: _____
Voice 10: other: _____

* Translate the following stanza into a fugue:

In Dreams We are an Octopus —
Each Nerve a velvet Fur —
Revolving as You talk to us —
Eight echoes and a Her

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____
_____

* How would you characterize the way Stanford responded to my rape?

_____
_____
_____
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_____

* Using a separate sheet of paper, compose a map of the Korean Peninsula in an alternate universe where Charles Bonesteel and Dean Rusk decided to use not the 38th parallel (line of latitude) but the 127th meridian east (line of longitude) to divide Korea into "East Korea" and "West Korea" (rather than "North" and "South"). Write a short essay contextualizing your map and explaining its historical significance.

* In your opinion, who wrote this book?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

* Multiple choice question: Hwabyung is

A) a medical condition
B) a culture-specific syndrome
C) a fictional malady that does not really exist
D) a tool of colonial oppression
E) a cathartic way of experiencing political agency and creative power
F) a term that some Korean Americans are trying to reclaim
G) _____
H) all of the above
I) none of the above
J) other

* Un-redact the following text: I closed my eyes. As I closed them my mind gently did something it had never done before: it became a hand. The hand struggled to grasp the doctor's words. It was a left-handed hand. I'm not sure whose hand it was. It wasn't mine. When I was a girl, like eleven or twelve, I went through this phase where I tried to write with my left hand. My left hand made so many spelling errors. Errors that my right hand knew not to make. But I persisted. Isn't that _____? I wanted a left hand of my own. This went on for a long, long time. Eventually the left-handed hand gave up. It stopped trying to grasp whatever it

had been trying to grasp. The hand became my mind again. Slowly, ineluctably, my mind came back. When my eyes reopened, they saw a TV monitor that could not have been there before. The monitor was dead. From the depths of its glassy surface, my reflection watched me silently. She was surprised, as was I, to see wires emanating from our head.

* How, if even at all, can this book help survivors?

* Compose a short story set in a 1990s Korea in an alternate universe where the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has never existed.

* What is the maiden name of Frankenstein's creature? In which year was *1984* published? In whose brain was a funeral felt? In which year was Neuromancer published? How do you spell the title of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's most well-known work (CASE-SENSITIVE)? Who killed the pork chops? Where did James Gatz go to college? What is the name of the chambermaid in *Pride and Prejudice*? Where did Jay Gatsby go to college? What's in a name? If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? Rose, art thou sick? Ottava rima, art thou under-utilized? What is the name of Beowulf's least reliable sword? In which month have sweet showers pierced the drought of March to its root? Do you await silent Tristero's empire? What is the name of Sethe's favorite daughter? Rhubarb is susan not susan not seat in bunch toys not wild and laughable not in little places not in neglect and vegetable not in fold coal age not please? Which flower by any other word would smell as fragrant? Who are these coming to the sacrifice? What men or gods are they? What maidens loth? What wild ecstasy? Whose dog is "Blue," and whose cat was "Jeoffry"? Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under? Along the fine tan sandy shelf is the land tugging at the sea from under? How many poems take place underwater? How many novels are set in the underworld? Whose self is hell? Whose selves are hell? What, fastened to a dying animal, knows not what it is? Are you my angel? When will you look at yourself through the grave? Who is Nobody, and are you Nobody too?

* Imagine a future where most of Korea is underwater due to climate change. The peninsula is now an archipelago. Write a brief overview addressing the following kinds of questions. Is Korea still divided into South and North? Are Seoul and Pyongyang still major cities? What are Korea's natural resources? Where do most Koreans live? How has Korea's new landscape/waterscape shaped — and been shaped by — Korean culture and traditions?

* Write a message to the ghost who lives in this book.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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* Create an alphabetical list of strategies for surviving:

A.
B.
C.
D.
E.
F.
G.
H.
I.
J.
K.
L.
M.
N.
O.

P.
Q.
R.
S.
T.
U.
V.
W. Writing
X.
Y.
Z.

* Using a separate sheet of paper, create your own concordance for this book.

* In the time you have left, create a concordance for your own life.

APPENDIX 1

After "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe": A Social Media Chronology* (originally published on March 15, 2018 in *ASAP/J*)

** (not including private correspondence)*

: :

November 3, 2017 · *Entropy*

"A Refuge for Jae-in Doe" is published.

: :

November 6, 2017 · Facebook

For so many years I carried the weight — the guilt — the thought: that the problem had started with me.

I shouldn't have been so naive. I shouldn't have "wanted to work with him." I shouldn't have gone to his office hours. I shouldn't have shown my face around the department. I shouldn't have let him say those things to me.

I shouldn't have been a young woman genuinely excited by books, by art, and by ideas. I shouldn't have been the kind of person who would say "I'm in love with this poem!" I shouldn't have found the material so exciting. I shouldn't have existed as an intellectual with a remotely desirable body.

I shouldn't have trusted him to be intelligent and imaginative enough to understand the notion of consent.

Or maybe I should have been intelligent and imaginative enough to understand that his psyche might be thrilled by the prospect of violating another.

After the disaster of Stanford, I found solace in science fiction. I had always loved science fiction, but in the wake of Stanford it became my universe. Its lyricism sustained me. Through it I found ways of dealing with trauma. I found agency. I found my bodies and my voices, new bodies and new voices. I rediscovered reality.

I still have nightmares and anxiety. I struggle with post-traumatic stress. But I'm trying to be better. And I'm getting even better at trying, thanks to Janice Lee and *Entropy* and all of you who have read "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe" and responded with sensitivity and compassion.

The messages I've gotten over the past several days confirm that the problem never started with me. It preceded me. I was not his only victim. He is not the only predator. Stanford is not the only place where sexual violence takes place.

At the same time: My rapist is not the only kind of person in the world. There are good and thoughtful people too. There are people like you.

I'm so sorry that this happened — happens — to me and to all of us. I'm sorry for the pain. I'm thankful for the love.

Seo-Young

: :

November 10, 2017

Along with fellow members of ASECS, the Executive Board read with horror Professor Seo-Young Chu's essay "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major," published in *Entropy* on November 3, 2017, which detailed her rape and abuse at the hands of the late Stanford University Professor and ASECS member Jay Fliegelman. Last year, when this incident was brought to the Society's attention, we contacted Professor Chu, and with her permission brought to the ASECS Board and the Graduate Student Caucus, which confers our Graduate Mentorship Award, a proposal to remove his name from this award. The letter Professor Chu addressed to the Board, and which she has now published, moved us deeply. The proposal was accepted unanimously and the name immediately removed from the award. The Board deeply regrets the pain caused to Professor Chu, and perhaps to others, with the initial naming of the award. Professor Chu's extraordinary courage in bringing the details of her experience to public attention now allows us to make clear the reasons for the name change, and we are grateful that she has called upon our Society more fully to address the problem of harassment and other forms of predatory behavior.

The ASECS Board unequivocally condemns all forms of harassment, discrimination, and abuse, including mistreatment based on sex, race, or status. In the months ahead we will be developing policies for incorporation into our bylaws that make clear that harassment and discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated. This process will require the commitment of our en-

tire membership to join together in a firm endorsement of our standards and values. On behalf of our Society, we accept this charge, and we thank Professor Chu and our colleagues for their eloquence and passion in urging us forward.

Executive Board of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies

: :

November 12, 2017 · Facebook

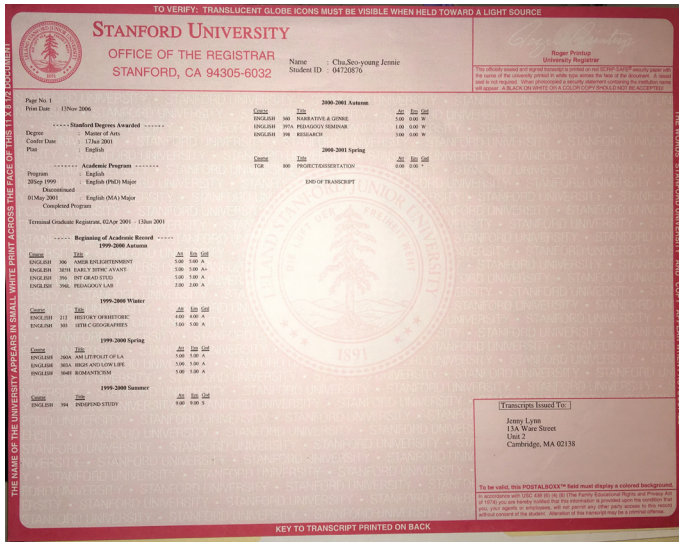
I am deeply sorry to any and all Asian Americans who were mistreated by Jay Fliegelman (in some cases viciously) after his return to Stanford following his two-year suspension without pay. The messages I've received are sickening. I am furious that he got away with it. I cannot help but feel responsible for it. I wish that I could do something about it.

: :

November 13, 2017 · Facebook

Q. The story I heard was that you were failing your classes and that's why you left

A. Here's my Stanford transcript. (Zoom in for course grades.)


TO VERIFY: TRANSLUCENT GLOBE ICONS MUST BE VISIBLE WHEN HELD TOWARD A LIGHT SOURCE

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR
STANFORD, CA 94305-6032

Name : Chu,Seo-young Jennie
Student ID : 04720876

Roger Printup
University Registrar

THE NAME OF THE UNIVERSITY APPEARS IN SMALL WHITE PRINT ACROSS THE FACE OF THIS 11 X 8 1/2 DOCUMENT

Page No. 1
Print Date : 12Nov 2006

----- Stanford Degrees Awarded -----
Degree : Master of Arts
Confer Date : 17Jun 2001
Plan : English

------- Academic Program -------
Program : English
20Sep 1999 : English (PhD) Major
Discontinued
01May 2001 : English (MA) Major
Completed Program

Terminal Graduate Registrant, 02Apr 2001 - 13Jun 2001

----- Beginning of Academic Record -----

1999-2000 Autumn

Course		Title	Att	Ern	Grd
ENGLISH	306	AMER ENLIGHTENMENT	5.00	5.00	A
ENGLISH	385H	EARLY 20THC AVANT-	5.00	5.00	A-
ENGLISH	396	INT GRAD STUDY	5.00	5.00	A
ENGLISH	396L	PEDAGOGY LAB	2.00	2.00	A

1999-2000 Winter

Course		Title	Att	Ern	Grd
ENGLISH	213	HIST(ORY OF)RHETORIC	4.00	4.00	A
ENGLISH	303	18TH C GEOGRAPHIES	5.00	5.00	A

1999-2000 Spring

Course		Title	Att	Ern	Grd
ENGLISH	260A	AM LIT:POLIT OF LA	5.00	5.00	A
ENGLISH	305A	HIGH AND LOW LIFE	5.00	5.00	A
ENGLISH	304B	ROMANTICISM	5.00	5.00	A

1999-2000 Summer

Course		Title	Att	Ern	Grd
ENGLISH	394	INDEPEND STUDY	9.00	9.00	S

2000-2001 Autumn

Course		Title	Att	Ern	Grd
ENGLISH	360	NARRATIVE & GENRE	5.00	0.00	W
ENGLISH	397A	PEDAGOGY SEMINAR	1.00	0.00	W
ENGLISH	398	RESEARCH	3.00	0.00	W

2000-2001 Spring

Course		Title	Att	Ern	Grd
TGR	800	PROJECT/DISSERTATION	0.00	0.00	*

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Transcripts Issued To:
Jenny Lynn
13A Ware Street
Unit 2
Cambridge, MA 02138

To be valid, this POSTALBOXX™ field must display a colored background.

In accordance with USC 438 (6) (4) (B) (The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974) you are hereby notified that this information is provided upon the condition that you, your agents or employees, will not permit any other party access to this record without consent of the student. Alteration of this transcript may be a criminal offense.

KEY TO TRANSCRIPT PRINTED ON BACK

Fig. 3. A Stanford University transcript for Seo-Young Jennie Chu shows eight As and one A+ for the 1999–2000 academic year and three Ws for Autumn 2000–2001 (during which the investigation was taking place).

I did fail the Quals Exam.

As I have written elsewhere, I spent that summer studying — from *Beowulf* to *White Noise*. I also tried to escape my rapist professor by living in Oakland, among other places. I pretended that everything was fine. I was not in contact with my rapist.

The day and night before the exam, language and literature disappeared from my brain. I could not sleep. I could not stay awake. I could not face the prospect of returning to Margaret Jacks Hall. I could not face — it sickened me; my flesh revolted — I could not face the man who had done those things to my body and mind. To my sense of dignity.

(Or maybe I understood the literature too deeply. Maybe *Clarissa,* which I had been assigned to read during my first year at Stanford, felt too real for me to bear.)

On the morning of my exam, I contacted the department and said I was quitting the program. In response, they asked another grad student to pick me up at my apartment and drive me to campus.

Inside the exam room I felt cornered. Although JF was not among my examiners, there were two faculty members whom I did not trust due to things I had heard about them from JF himself. I don't remember the questions. I do remember feeling as if suddenly I was trapped in a war where the only options I had were to fight or to die.

How did I get home? I'm not sure. But my body was wrong. It was numb, all of it. Literally. Frozen.

After I learned that I had failed the exam, the phone rang again. Back then I had no caller ID. With a numb hand and with numb fingers I picked up the phone. The voice on the other end: my rapist offering cheerful condolences.

: :

November 13, 2017 · Facebook

Q.
Jay was a human being. Why tarnish the academic reputation of a brilliant scholar who happened to be a flawed character?

A.
His abuse of me was not just a sign of "flawed character." It was an instance of scholarly irresponsibility. It was an intellectual failure.

His mind could not grasp that a female student might wish to work with him without being propositioned by him repeatedly.

His inability to understand the word "no" — his inability to understand consent — revealed a vast emptiness in him, a disappointing lack of imagination.

He was indeed a human being.

: :

November 15, 2017 · Facebook

Dear Professor A— W—,

In the year 2000, you directly witnessed Professor Jay Fliegelman's mistreatment of me.

The three of us were in his living room. I had been late to the gathering. I had not wanted to be there.

(I used to be the kind of person who eagerly looked forward to academic events.)

He was the William Robertson Coe Professor of American Literature in the English Department at Stanford University.

You were an assistant professor in the English Department at Stanford University.

I was a first-year graduate student in the English Department at Stanford University.

You saw and heard the abuse.

How did you respond? Did you try to intervene? No. You laughed and played along.

At the time I forgave you. What else could you have done, right? You did not yet have tenure.

Today, you are the Richard W. Lyman Professor of the Humanities and Chair of the English Department at Stanford University.

In an article online, you exuberantly praise the man who sexually harassed me before your eyes.

You befriended him even after he was punished by Stanford University for what he did to me.

Now that you are chair of the English Department at Stanford University, you have considerable power and responsibility. How will you use your privilege?

Note: I am not interested in suing you.

I am not asking for an apology. (People tell me that to ask you for an apology would be asking for too much.)

All I ask, then, is for you to explain why you chose to befriend a man who unapologetically committed sexual violence. (What you saw, by the way, was not the worst of it.)

Again: I am not suing you.

I am too tired to seek an apology.

I am seeking a thoughtful explanation written in the English language.

Thank you.
Seo-Young J. Chu

: :

November 16, 2017 · Facebook

Q. Shouldn't you be doing your job?

A. This year I am on sabbatical leave. I'm supposed to be completing my book on North Korea. Instead (or in addition) I am answering questions about sexual violence and the abuse of power in academia. I am trying to make sense of what happened to me at Stanford. I am learning that the fallout from sexual violence is toxic and far-reaching in ways most people don't understand.

Dealing with the aftermath of sexual violence is hard work. The labor is emotional, intellectual, scholarly, and sometimes physical. Such work is often unacknowledged; moreover, it is in many ways unacknowledgeable. (I can't exactly put "Played a part in renaming an award originally named after my rapist" on my cv.)

One reason why such work goes unacknowledged: sexual violence — so sickening, so vile — is itself difficult to acknowledge as part of our reality. The work of thinking and writing about it is then sometimes misperceived as dirty, "salacious," toxic, dangerous, undignified, and unreal.

(There are individuals who do not wish to be associated with me. I understand their reluctance — perhaps more than they know.)

In truth the toxicity inheres in the original acts of violence. I didn't ask to be violated. But as someone who was near the blast and who somehow survived, I can offer evidence of injury and injustice. As a survivor who is lucky and privileged to have tenure, I feel an obligation to stay actively involved in my own case and to keep bearing witness — even if it means losing friends.

You may not be able to see the invisible work in which I've been engaging, but I have in fact been doing my job. I am doing it right now.

: :

November 18, 2017 · Facebook

Dear Professor A— W—:

In a tribute to Jay Fliegelman in the 2007 English Department Newsletter, you write:

"How do you remember spontaneity? This is a paradox — and a challenge — that will stay with the friends and family, students and colleagues who loved Jay for a long time. We will try to repeat or remember or imitate Jay's intelligent, rebellious, and deeply generous spontaneity — but improvisation, of course, doesn't lend itself to repetition. This is not merely a new question, however — it's one that has always struck friends of Jay with particular force."

Spontaneity. I remember Jay's spontaneity. I was "struck" by it — literally and figuratively — with "particular force."

He was indeed skilled at "improvisation." In my experience with him I never knew which to expect: the brilliant teacher, the man who gossiped crudely about others in the department, the lewd braggart, the Stanford insider, the collector of rare objects, the man to whom I was more puppet than human.

I don't doubt your characterization of Jay. I believe you. I believe you when you describe Jay's spontaneity as "deeply generous." You are fortunate to have enjoyed that side of him.

Is it too much for me to ask you to believe me when I say that Jay's "spontaneity" could be ungenerous too? Is it beyond the

limits of your imagination to believe that his "spontaneity" broke me, shocked me, shamed me, left me deformed and hollow? To this day I wonder if I count as a whole person. I doubt my intelligence constantly, even as I struggle to forgive a man whose inability to grasp the word "no" constituted a remarkable failure of the intellect. I feel guilty for having been, and still being, a queer woman, an Asian American woman, a mentally ill woman — a woman. I feel guilty for having dared to try to get a PhD at Stanford University.

You also write: "As with one of Jay's brilliant off-the-cuff monologues, 'you had to be there.' Jay's spontaneity was always, in fact, connected to his life-affirming refusal of illness — his intellectual power always played out both against, and in relation to, his aware-ness of frailty and vulnerability."

Yes, Professor Fliegelman's institutional power played out against and in relation to his awareness of my frailty and vulnerability. He abused his power. He exploited my vulnerability. Many people were hurt in the aftermath. It did not have to be that way. It should not have to be that way.

"You had to be there," you write. Maybe that's why the Stanford English Department can't seem to believe that Jay Fliegelman raped me. *You had to be there.*

What I don't understand is why you can't seem to believe that Jay Fliegelman sexually harassed and intimidated me. You didn't have to be there. You were there.

All I seek: An explanation. Answers. In order to be a better professor myself, I need to understand how my professional life began. In order to be able to speak on behalf of anyone else, I need first to speak openly and fluently on my own behalf.

Thank you for reading this letter.

Seo-Young Chu

: :

November 19, 2017 · Facebook

According to my emails, Professor Jay Fliegelman raped me on/around Saturday 2/5/2000.

To keep him from continuing to assault me, I told him that I was a lesbian. The truth: I was attracted to women and men. I had just turned 22, was sexually inexperienced, and felt thoroughly confused about my sexuality. But because my dissertation adviser's ego was so fragile, and because he controlled my professional future, I felt I had no choice but to let his institutional power determine my sexual orientation before I could make an honest decision for myself.

He continued to harass me. For weeks. For months.

I was hospitalized (psychiatry) from 2/19 to 2/21. After I was discharged, my rapist paid a visit to the ward where I had stayed. He visited not as a patient, but as a professor concerned about a student. How do I know about this visit? He told me about it himself.

When I sought information about the English Department's sexual harassment liaison, I was referred to Jay Fliegelman's dissertation adviser, friend, and mentor: Professor George Dekker. I could not trust George Dekker. He would have sided with his protégé.

The department chair at the time was Professor Terry Castle. Knowing that I was attracted to women, Jay enjoyed taunting me with explicit fantasies about the Department Chair. Later, he let me know that he told her I had a crush on her. How was I supposed to respond? I never knew exactly how to interact with Professor Castle when I took her class during the spring. Did she know that I was being abused and gaslit? Did she know

about the rape? How could she know — and yet how could she not? We were reading and analyzing *Clarissa*.

I still blame myself for not leaving as soon as the abuse began. All I had to do: walk away. Pack my belongings in a car. Drive. Into the open future: drive. I know it's just a fantasy. But in some alternative universe, it is what happened. She has a daughter now. She has a house full of plants. She has a cog (part dog, part cat). And she is not an agoraphobe. For a living, she teaches others how to fly — without the aid of airplanes. The first step is to shut one's eyes and imagine floating.

: :

Sent: Monday, November 20, 2017 6:42:32 PM
To: Seo-Young J Chu
Subject: Letter from the Stanford Graduate Community

Dear Professor Chu,

We are writing to you today to respond to your lyric essay, "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major." As current and former PhD students at Stanford, we are familiar with your story's setting, and the communities there: Margaret Jacks Hall, graduate student housing, the Stanford campus and greater Bay Area. As such, we read your words with a mixture of horror, sadness, and recognition. We write to say that we believe you, and we stand with you.

We are committed to fighting misconduct and abuse and supporting survivors. We will also follow your lead in seeing literary studies as a site of both pain and renewal. As we work towards material change, we are grateful for your bravery, your clarity, and your honesty.

In solidarity,
The Graduate Students of the Stanford Department of English

: :

November 21, 2017 · Facebook

I couldn't sleep last night. I have a radio interview this afternoon — recorded, not live. These interviews are like exams to me. I need to be prepared for questions about Stanford, questions about what happened to my body and my psyche on that campus. Meanwhile I have yet to receive any answers from Stanford in response to my own questions. Such silence is loud, especially at 5am. I realized this morning that maybe I need to modify my strategy. My words aren't working, but something else might. I now plan to donate money to the Stanford English Department specifically for the purposes of getting them to talk about sexual violence in academia. My question: How much money does an honest and open dialogue cost? I'm being completely serious.

: :

November 21, 2017 · Facebook

Interview was fine, but I stammered here and there and may not have used the English language correctly. Also at one point I started to shake involuntarily and then was crying a bit. Finished interview okay. Left studio, wandered, dissociated, am now in a CVS. Everything smells like cinnamon. Everything sounds like my voice saying: "To stop my professor from raping me again, I had to lie about my sexuality." What I realized during the interview — what I forgot to say out loud — is that no student should feel trapped into lying about her sexual orientation just in order to avoid being raped by a man who threatens to control her career. And no survivor should be told that being attracted to individuals of all genders means that one was "asking for it."

: :

November 21, 2017 · Twitter

He harassed & raped me. He never apologized. He was suspended for two years without pay. He returned to campus, enjoyed a "Jayfest," has a library named after him, & is celebrated by the current @StanfordEnglish chair. @Stanford your silence is toxic. How much does dialogue cost?

: :

November 27, 2017 · Facebook

Many thanks for your comments and messages. Reading through them, I see so much conflicting advice. All of it comes from a place of generosity and friendship. Such dissonance confirms what we already know. Addressing sexual violence is an infinitely complicated matter that requires thoughtful, patient, ingenious dialogue.

I'm grateful for your voices.

I have numerous thoughts and questions about the letter I received yesterday. For example:

- I have no memory of being compelled to watch a "porno video." (Was I drugged?) I do remember being compelled by Professor Fliegelman to stroke the pages of a pornographic book, a book that happened to be rare and antique. Why would Stanford omit that detail?
- The "contact" between his body and mine was more extensive than what the letter describes. Why isn't the word "rape" mentioned?
- Why doesn't the letter mention my hospitalization?

: :

November 28, 2017 · Facebook

Dear Stanford,

Thank you for your letter. Thank you for apologizing for what you allowed Professor Jay Fliegelman to do to me in the year 2000. Your condolences are helpful.

Thank you for your summary of the report. The summary answered some questions. Yet it left other questions unanswered. Moreover, the summary raised new questions.

For these reasons, and given that Jay Fliegelman is no longer alive, I hereby request a copy of the investigation report itself and a copy of the censure letter Jay Fliegelman received.

If there are other victims or individuals whose privacy rights are implicated, please redact that information and send me the redacted version of the report.

I am also writing to request your responses to the following concerns.

Is there a reason why I was not given a copy of the report in 2000/2001?

Why doesn't the summary mention my hospitalization?

Was Jay Fliegelman ever reported by anyone other than me?

I have no memory of being compelled to watch a "porno video." (Was I drugged?) I do remember being compelled by Professor Fliegelman to "stroke" the pages of a pornographic book, a book that happened to be rare and antique. Why would Stanford mention the "porno video" and omit the rare antique pornographic book? Might such a book have been part of the "Fliegelman Library" that Stanford now possesses?

Why did the investigation find Jay Fliegelman responsible for harassment and not assault? The "contact" between his body and mine was more extensive than what the summary describes.

Why isn't the word "rape" mentioned? He violated the place between my thighs with both his mouth and his genitalia. I unfortunately remember him shoving his body into mine. (I hate the fact that I had to type those words.)

I hope and trust that the Stanford English Department is using my (small) donation to promote honest, patient, thoughtful, revelatory, productive dialogue about sexual violence at Stanford and in academia.

Thank you again for your humanity and your care.

Yours,
Seo-Young Chu

Seo-Young J. Chu · Associate Professor · Department of English · Queens College, CUNY

: :

November 29, 2017 · Facebook

Journalist: "Are you sure it happened? Are you sure you weren't imagining it?"

"Yes, I'm sure," I answered. In the hectic charge of the moment, I didn't think to ask why she would ask me such questions. Now I wonder if the fact that I was — am — bipolar made her doubt my veracity.

Of course it did. And I understand that her questions were rigorous, that she was doing her job and doing it well. I just wonder: Do journalists ask those accused of sexual assault, "Are you

sure you weren't imagining that she was sexually attracted to you? Are you sure she was a willing partner? Are you sure the consent was not a figment of your imagination?"

: :

December 3, 2017 · Facebook

Q.
What should his punishment have been?

A.
All of my answers are science-fictional. A virtual reality program allowing him to feel exactly how I felt. Time travel to a future where righteous women rule the universe. Being forced to re-live, from my point of view, over and over again, the violation of consent.

But none of these answers are realistic.

I used to think that his punishment was severe. Now that I know what I know, I'm stunned and appalled.

: :

December 14, 2017 · Twitter

To the cat in the photo and to all other readers: "thank you" feels inadequate, but all I have is *thank you* — for bearing witness, for sharing the pain, for recognizing me as a sentient creature. I recognize you too.

: :

December 27, 2017 · Facebook

Q.
What do you want?

A.
Right now I want (1) to receive a copy of the report, and (2) to be included in honest and respectful dialogue about sexual violence in the Stanford English department.

I need to understand what happened to my body and my psyche in the year 2000.

Am I asking for too much? A friend of mine says that I should forget Stanford — just let it go. He can't bear to see me waste my energy and time on the past. He says I should let myself enjoy life, move forward, and feel comfortable.

Of course I want to enjoy life and move forward, etc. But there is a hole in the year 2000 where my life keeps disappearing like sand into an alien hourglass. And there are two concrete steps that Stanford University can take to help repair the injury. (See above.) Step 1 alone would require minimal effort.

For me simply to ignore such facts and feel like a comfortable human being would be impossible. Or perhaps it would be possible with the aid of extreme drugs. Both because and although I often fantasize about blissful oblivion, consuming extreme drugs is not an option that I can pursue.

: :

January 10, 2018 · Facebook

Dear Provost Persis Drell:

Thank you for your 11/28/17 blog post. I am glad that Stanford University now welcomes the "#spotlight on #sexual_assault and #sexual #misconduct perpetrated by individuals #abusing their positions of authority and influence."

I hope to engage in open and constructive dialogue with you. For now I have a few questions and comments. If there are any errors below, I want you to let me know. I trust that you are as devoted to correcting mistakes as I am.

You write: "In 2013, consensual sexual or romantic relationships were prohibited between faculty members and undergraduate students as well as between faculty and graduate students for whom the faculty member has or may in the future have academic responsibility."

Thank you for mentioning this detail. Your post would be even stronger, I think, if you included a clearer explanation of the ways in which #Stanford can prevent *non-consensual* "relationships."

Let me give you an example of how one such "relationship" began.

In 1999, a 21-year-old #KoreanAmerican woman named Jennie Chu arrived on Stanford's campus. Why was she at Stanford? She was there to receive an education. She was there to be trained at a school that had been characterized to her as one of the best in the world. She was there to write a dissertation and to earn a degree. If she was lucky, she might eventually find a tenure-track job.

She did not go to Stanford to be invited by her #dissertation #adviser to a one-on-one dinner where his questions about her work would be oddly juxtaposed with his questions about her sexuality. She did not go to Stanford to be "mentored" with the line "All men have #rape #fantasies, including your father." (Her

"#mentor" said this after Jennie shared with him the fact that her father had been #orphaned by the #KoreanWar.) She did not go to Stanford imagining that the William Robertson #Coe Professor of American Literature would see the scars on her wrists, ask about them, learn that she had recently been diagnosed with a #disability called bipolar disorder, and nevertheless proceed to violate her mind and her body.

(Or did he target her *because of* rather than despite her disability?)

Remember, too: Jennie was new to California, new to Stanford, and new to the profession. Professor Jay #Fliegelman had been at Stanford University and in the profession for decades. His own Stanford dissertation adviser, Professor #GeorgeDekker, was still teaching when Jennie started the PhD program. In fact, Professor Dekker was the department's sexual #harassment liaison — or so Jennie was informed when at one point she tried to seek help.

Jennie was harassed and raped by more than just a man. According to Professor Ramon Saldivar #RamónSaldívar, Professor Fliegelman was "an institution unto himself" ("Jay Fliegelman, leading figure in American studies, dies at 58," by Cynthia Haven, Stanford News Service, 8/17/07).

Jennie was violated by an #institution. A Stanford institution.

The "education" — the brutal #hazing — Jennie received at the hands of Stanford University was so devastating that she could not bear to continue being "Jennie." Right after Stanford molested me, I started to go by my Korean name: Seo-Young.

I have been accused of being naive and trusting. These accusations are true. I was naive to trust Stanford. I was naive to trust Professor Fliegelman. I was naive to trust that the #WilliamRob-

ertsonCoe Professor of American Literature would know how to use his power responsibly and with intelligence.

(Scenario: you are a vulnerable graduate student. Your adviser — the William Robertson Coe Professor; a man so powerful that he is known as an "institution unto himself" — asks you if you are a virgin. How do you respond? Startled, I told him, honestly, yes. Was that the wrong answer? Was that where I began to give "#consent"? Was I supposed to lie? Was I supposed to tell this powerful man — a man who had the ability to ruin my career — that he had crossed a line? I have replayed that moment countless times in my head. Tell me, #Provost #PersisDrell, what should I have done?)

I may seem to remain naive in many ways. For example: I have never hired a lawyer. I have never sued Professor Fliegelman or Stanford University. I am not interested in suing Stanford University. I don't want your money. Although I am far from rich, I am lucky to be able to afford existing on this planet without financial assistance from a school that still gives me nightmares about having no future worth living.

What do I want? As I wrote above, I want #dialogue. I want #answerability. I want Stanford to take my questions seriously.

Why does Stanford let academic "stars" get away with sexual violence? #DonaldTrump: "when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything." Is this how Stanford wishes to be known — as a #Trump university?

Does the naiveté of a vulnerable student make her culpable of "consenting to rape"? Is that the message you hope to communicate to the world?

When #prospective Stanford #students and #parents and Stanford #alumni ask me, "Can we #trust Stanford?" how should I honestly respond?

Thank you again for welcoming the spotlight.

I look forward to productive #dialogue with you and with other members of the Stanford community.

Seo-Young Chu

: :

January 12, 2018 · Facebook

As soon as I opened the "List of Titles in the Jay #Fliegelman #Library" (emailed to me by a librarian at #Stanford), I started to cry. I had no power over my body. I wept. It sounded like laughter, but it was not laughter. Perhaps it was not even crying. I don't know what it was. All I know is that water was streaming from two holes in my face and my body was shaking and my lungs were full of pleas.

: :

January 12, 2018 · Facebook (comment in response to a question)

I needed to find out which books JF used as "weapons" of rape. I found one of the books and am hoping Stanford doesn't decide to sell or destroy it before I visit next month:

"107. Barbarities of the Enemy, Exposed in a Report. Worcester, 1814.
[Waste sheets from *Fanny Hill* on cover; a remarkable survival]"

: :

January 25, 2018 · Twitter

Dear @Stanford: Here is my reply to your silence. I will give up access to the report on the investigation of my rape if you do the following: Donate one million dollars to @rainn on behalf, in honor, in the name of all survivors of sexual violence. This would help heal wounds.

[NOTE: Update: In 2018, after I met with the Stanford General Counsel in person to discuss my case, I convinced the Stanford Provost and General Counsel to offer personal contributions to the anti-sexual assault organization RAINN.]

APPENDIX 2

"Dear Stanford: You must reckon with your history of sexual violence" (Originally published on July 12, 2022, in *The Stanford Daily*)

Dear Stanford: It should never have come to this.

Dear Stanford: I've given you so many opportunities to correct your mistakes.

Dear Stanford: When you create traumatized alumni, ask your traumatized alumni for donations, betray our trust again and again, continually fail to learn from your blunders, and have the audacity to claim you are "helpless," all while remaining obscenely rich, you cannot call yourself a "good school."

Dear Stanford: This was supposed to be an "open letter" but my trauma is radioactive and this letter is mutating, turning into something else.

Dear Stanford: You had decades to prevent the Barletta situation. Decades. All that wealth — and for what? Truly a waste. You have no excuse.

By the way, when I address "Stanford" here, I am addressing those in positions of power and authority. The more power you have, and the more you are being paid, the more accountable you are to your community and for Stanford's failures.

Dear Stanford: In 2000, you let your "star" faculty violate my 22-year-old self. That's how my career began — with violence I am still struggling to comprehend. I was so naive and inexperienced I was confused by what was happening. I —

Dear Stanford: Now you're sending your rape culture to CUNY where I work and teach? How dare you! How dare you invade my home?

Dear Stanford: This letter is repetitive because traumatic reliving is repetitive and you continue to resurrect those hideous memories by making headlines about rape culture on your campus.

Dear Stanford: My parents sacrificed a lot to give me a life less chaotic and violent than theirs. They trusted you to keep their daughter safe from the "bad" behavior of serial abusers. Their trust was betrayed — not once, not twice, but over and over and over and over and over again.

Dear Stanford: CUNY is underfunded. You are overfunded. What is the correct way to redress such inequality? I don't know. I do know that letting your rape culture make contact with CUNY students is the wrong way.

Dear Stanford: Colleagues were "repeatedly asked to 'babysit' Barletta"? In what universe is such infantilization of a serial abuser acceptable?

Dear Stanford: You cannot possibly claim that you are "helpless" here, that you "had no idea," that you are understaffed or under-resourced.

Dear Stanford: When I was a 22-year-old first-year PhD student in your English Department, your "star" faculty raped and harassed me. I was unable, under such circumstances, to excel, to collaborate with colleagues (he isolated me), unable at times to work (I was too busy trying to avoid being raped), often unable to think at all. And my abuser did this to others at Stanford too. Not only did my abuser harm multiple students, but you continue to allow multiple people in positions of power and authority to harm generations of students and employees.

Dear Stanford: How could you. How could you name that library in his honor after you yourself punished him for what he did to me? He used one of those books to — I won't finish this sentence. I won't go there. Not again.

Dear Stanford: You have squandered my patience and goodwill.

Dear Stanford: Archuleta, Barletta, Fliegelman, Moretti — why? Just — why?

Dear Stanford: This is not how I want to be spending my summer. I was actually working on my book project when news about Vincent Barletta "mentoring" CUNY students reset my brain's time zone to #PTSD. For the past month, I've been re-living the year 2000 (when your "star" faculty violated my 22-year-old self).

Dear Stanford: Fuck you for covering up the abuse and the punishment.

Dear Stanford: You are Victor Frankenstein and my suffering is the creature you made. Take responsibility for your creation.

Dear Stanford: I had just turned 22 years old. I was naive and inexperienced. I was a first-year graduate student, new to the profession, new to teaching, new to California, new to Stanford. He was tenured. He was powerful. He was in his 50s. He had been a Stanford institution for decades. This is disjointed because I'm reliving it all over again. Shortly after he violated me, I was hospitalized. Shortly after I was discharged from the hospital, I gave a guest lecture on Seneca Falls and women's rights. His response was to tell me I forgot to mention women's right to sexual pleasure. There are gaps here because trauma is nonlinear, trauma broke my sense of time. At some point you conducted an investigation. As a result of the investigation, which was a brutal experience, you punished my abuser by suspending him for two years without pay. Some of his colleagues had the gall to blame me for the whole debacle.

Dear Stanford: By enabling rape culture and abuse to flourish, you promote hostile thinking environments. You poison ideas. You destroy minds. You weaken intellectual communities. You prevent work from happening.

Dear Stanford: Every minute, hour, day, week, month, year, decade of your silence and inaction is disrupting my "career," is relevant to my work, has shaped my sense of self as an academic.

Dear Stanford: I've never sued you. I've generously given you free feedback. I've extended every deadline. I've been more than patient with you. I've spent countless hours educating you and cleaning up your messes.

Dear Stanford: By criticizing you I am not "attacking" your students, alumni, and workers. I am trying to make your campus better. Safer. More hospitable to learning. By speaking out like this I am trying to be a good alumna. I hope you are paying attention.

Dear Stanford: The truth is that my career started with rape. My career has been shaped by rape. My sense of who I am as an academic: shaped by rape. The gaps in my CV are trauma-generated plot holes that lead to Northern California in the year 2000.

Dear Stanford: I'm angry, I'm disabled, I have work to do, I have a migraine. I want to lie down and shut my eyes and rest. But this is too important. I can't rest until CUNY is safe from your rape culture.

Dear Stanford: Have you even read "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe"? The whole point of my sharing all that pain — and in a language your English Department would understand: sonnets! The Western Canon! English (Major)! — was to prevent more students from being harmed.

Dear Stanford: I am as "proud" to have a degree from your school as I would be "proud" to sport a blood diamond. Yes, the degree may glitter. But how much pain, injustice, conflict, humiliation, abuse, and violence does such glitter belie?

Dear Stanford: I am ashamed to be associated with you.

Dear Stanford: If I were to write a book about your response to my requests for answers and answerability, most of the book's pages would be blank. Vacuous. Empty.

Dear Stanford: Emptiness, too, is a response. And by definition it is worthless.

Dear Stanford: Speaking out does not come naturally to me. Speaking out does not come naturally to many of us. In fact, it hurts. But remaining silent hurts even more. Don't let our advocacy be in vain.

Dear Stanford: Prove to me that CUNY students are safe from the toxic rape culture that flourishes on your campus.

Dear Stanford: You are indebted to me. You owe it to me — to all of us — to do better.

Endnotes

POP QUIZ: AT WHAT POINT DOES *DICTEE* (1982) BY THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA BEGIN?

"Tell me the story": Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* (University of California Press, 2001), 11.

"an enigmatic black-and-white landscape that makes direct contact with darkness when the book is shut": ibid., front endpapers.

"Open paragraph": ibid., 1.

"Aller à la ligne": ibid.

"[frontispiece (verso): high-contrast black-and-white picture of a dark surface etched with Hangul letters: "어머니 보고싶어. 배가고파요. 고향에 가고싶다."]": ibid., frontispiece.

"TO MY MOTHER TO MY FATHER": ibid., dedication, front matter.

"tell even us": ibid., 11.

A REFUGE FOR JAE-IN DOE: FUGUES IN THE KEY OF ENGLISH MAJOR

On February 9, 2016, at 8:21 PM, I was called by Stanford to write "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major." The caller — an anonymous student contacting alumni for donations — didn't mean to trigger my "calling" as an advocate for survivors. But by making viscerally available to me the violence of what Stanford did to my younger self, our 18-minute dialogue inspired me to write the "Invocation" with which "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe" opens — an "Invocation" in which I re-live the dissonances of the phone call and its resetting of my brain's time zone from EST to PTSD. Our dialogue also inspired the dialogic format of "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe." In addition to evoking "fugue states," "flight response" ("fugue" is etymologically rooted in flight), and related words like "refuge," "refugee," and "fugitive," the noun "Fugues" in the piece's subtitle is meant to call to mind the dialogic nature of musical fugues. Polyphonic and contrapuntal by design, the fugue as a framework has allowed me to put into dialogue with one another multiple voices, forms, traditions, genres, modes, and discourses — from the sonnet to speculative fiction, from model minority stereotypes to xenomorphic blazons, from Milton and Shakespeare to Asian American studies, from classical music to *Law and Order: SVU,* from Dickinsonian exam questions to social media posts, from medical forms to futuristic forms of prayer, from "Jennie" (my American name) to "Seo-Young" (my first name, my Korean name, my chosen name, the name I started using shortly after I left Stanford and have been using ever since).

The year I was called by Stanford — the long 2016 — is also the year getting tenure gave me the courage to Google my Stanford abuser's name for the first time. Only then did I learn, to my horror, that Stanford had covered up the abuse and their own punishment of my abuser for what he had done to my younger self. There were even awards and a library named in his honor. While working to rename one such award, I suffered

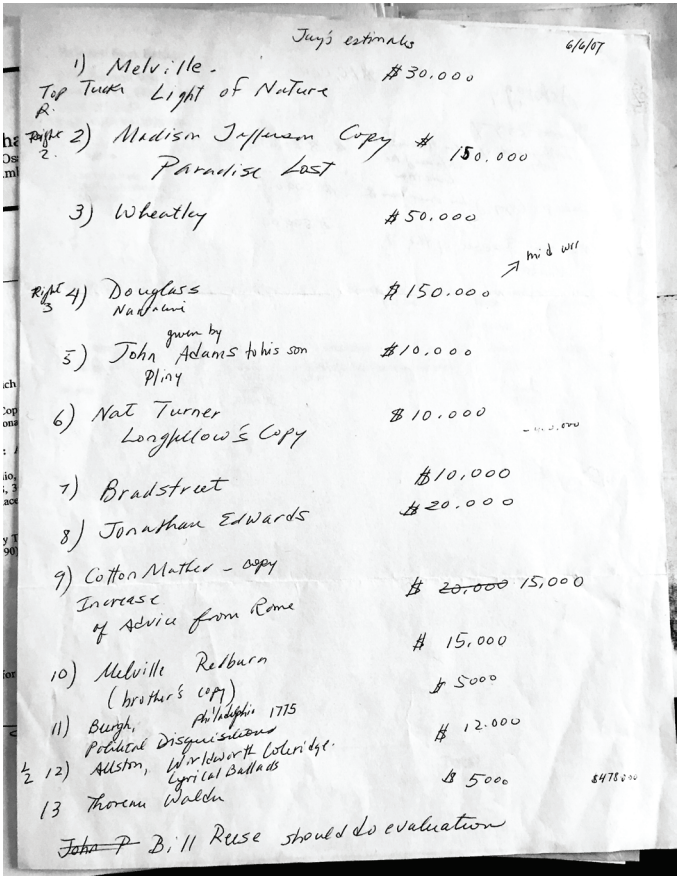
a breakdown and found myself hospitalized against my will. Shortly after my hospitalization, during which I was treated by psychiatrists who had no idea how to care for queer disabled Korean American rape survivors, Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States. All of these events shaped the writing of "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe."

Many thanks to *Entropy Magazine,* where "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major" was first published in November 2017. *Entropy* — a vital literary community and publication — is dearly missed. Here and elsewhere, its work lives on.

"'There's a great pleasure in teaching freshmen because you're sort of being folded into their lives at a particular, powerful moment in which you can make a difference,' he said in the 1996 interview. 'And to some degree, you can "convert" them to English. It becomes a way of trawling for majors'": Cynthia Haven, "Jay Fliegelman, Leading Figure in American Studies, Dies at 58," *Stanford Report,* August 17, 2007, https://news.stanford.edu/pr/2007/pr-fliegelman-082207.html. [Note: This webpage existed when I wrote "A Refuge-for Jae-in Doe." Today, when I click on the link, I find a 404 error page. I saved the webpage as a pdf.]

"In a 1996 News Service interview, [JF] described the 18th-century attitude toward belongings this way: 'There was a sense that objects were preferred over people because they didn't leave you, they didn't talk back, and you could project a certain subjectivity and have an intense relationship with them, particularly with books,' he said": ibid.

"You can keep nothing safe from our eyes and ears. This is your own history. We are your most perilous and dutiful brethren, the song of our hearts at once furious and sad. For only you could grant me these lyrical modes. I call them back to you. Here is the sole talent I ever dared nurture. Here is all of my


Jay's estimates 6/6/07

1) Melville - $30,000
Top Tuck Light of Nature
R.

Paffle 2) Madison Jefferson Copy $150,000
2. Paradise Lost

3) Wheatley $50,000

Right 4) Douglass mid will
3 Narrative $150,000

given by
5) John Adams to his son $10,000
Pliny

6) Nat Turner $10,000
Longfellow's Copy

7) Bradstreet $10,000

8) Jonathan Edwards $20,000

9) Cotton Mather - copy
Increase of Advice from Rome $~~20,000~~ 15,000

10) Melville Redburn $15,000
(brother's copy)

11) Burgh, Philadelphia 1775 $5000
Political Disquisitions

½ 12) Allston, Wordsworth Coleridge $12,000
Lyrical Ballads

13 Thoreau Walden $5000 $478,000

~~John P~~ Bill Reuse should do evaluation

Fig. 4. A photograph taken by me in 2018 during a visit to the Jay Fliegelman Library at Stanford University shows a handwritten document titled "Jay's estimates," dated 6/6/07. Items include "Madison Jefferson copy $150,000," "Wheatley $50,000" and "Douglass $150,000."

American education": Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (Riverhead Books), 320.

"'NOLI ME TANGERE': A KIND OF VILLANELLE": Cf. Thomas Wyatt's sixteenth-century Petrarchan sonnet "Whoso List to Hunt, I Know where is an Hind."

"AFTER EMILY DOE": In 2019, after I published "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe," Emily Doe was revealed to be Chanel Miller when she published her book *Know My Name.*

"TO BE ON THE MARKET DURING HIS FESTIVAL": "festival" is an allusion to the "JayFest," a 2007 celebration during which my rapist's friends and colleagues honored his life and work.

I, DISCOMFORT WOMAN: A FUGUE IN F MINOR

[1] Cynthia Haven, "Stanford Acquires Late Professor's Renowned Collection of 'Association Copies,'" *Stanford Report,* March 12, 2008, https://news.stanford.edu/news/2008/march12/oldbooks-031208.html. [Note: This webpage existed when I wrote "I, Discomfort Woman." Today the link takes me directly to the Stanford Report home page. I saved Haven's article as a pdf.]

[2] "Jay's Estimates 6/6/07." Photograph taken by Seo-Young Chu during a 2018 visit to the Jay Fliegelman Library at Stanford University (fig. 4).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Haven, "Stanford Acquires Late Professor's Renowned Collection of 'Association Copies.'"

[5] Ibid.

[6] Zach Hutchins, "The 'Raping Numbers' of Bradstreet's Admirers," *Early American Literature* 55, no. 3 (2020): 623–50, at 623, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26973803. See also Wendy Beth Hyman, "Teaching Titus Andronicus and Ovidian Myth When Sexual Violence is on the Public Stage," *Global Shakespeare and Social Injustice: Towards a Transformative Encounter,* ed. Chris Thurman and Sandra Young (Arden-Bloomsbury Global Shakespeare Inverted series, 2023).

[7] "Jay's Estimates."

[8] Quoted in Haven, "Stanford Acquires Late Professor's Renowned Collection of 'Association Copies.'"

[9] "Memorial Resolution: Jay Fliegelman (1949–2007)," *Stanford Report,* April 2008, https://news.stanford.edu/news/2008/april23/memlflie-042308.html. [Note: This webpage existed when I wrote "I, Discomfort Woman." Today the link takes me directly to the Stanford Report home page. I saved the memorial resolution as a pdf.]

[10] Haven, "Stanford Acquires Late Professor's Renowned Collection of 'Association Copies.'"

[11] Nicholas Basbanes, *Patience and Fortitud*e (Harper Perennial, 2003), 146–47.

[12] Jill Lepore, "The Lingering of Loss," *The New Yorker,* July 8, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/07/08/the-lingering-of-loss.

[13] My first-person experience.

[14] The novel: John Cleland, *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749).

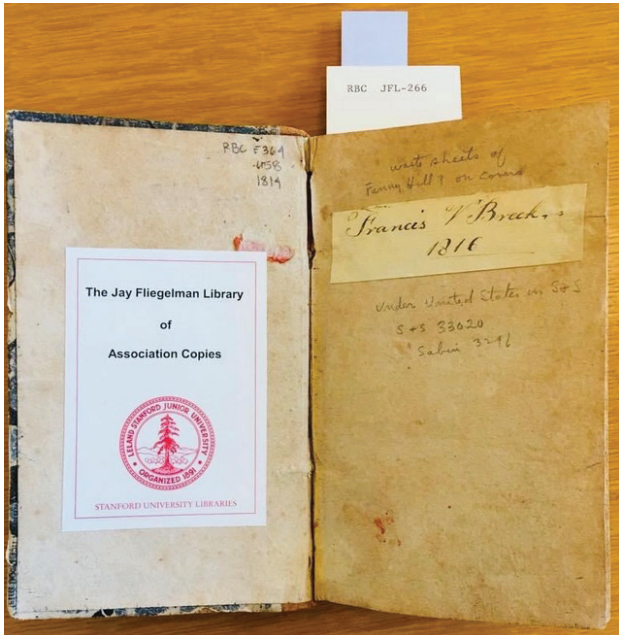


Fig. 5. A photograph taken by me shows an open book featuring a bookplate labeled "The Jay Fliegelman Library of Association Copies, Stanford University Libraries." Written in pencil on the endpaper are the words "Waste sheets of Fanny Hill on covers."

[15] This association copy existed when I held it in my hands during a 2018 visit (fig. 5). I can no longer find reliable records of its existence.

[16] "Barbarities of the Enemy, exposed in a report of the Committee of the House of Representatives of the United States, appointed to enquire into the spirit and manner in which the war [the forgotten war of 1812] has been waged by the enemy, and the documents accompanying said report" (Printed at Worcester, by Isaac Sturtevant, 1814), 117.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Debra Zumwalt, Letter to Seo-Young Chu, November 27, 2017, https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4323656-Debra-Zumwalt-Letter-to-Seo-Young-Chu-11-27-2017.html; Alex Tsai, "Provost, General Counsel Offer Personal Contributions to Anti-Sexual Assault Organization after Stanford Denies Fliegelman Victim's Request for Donation," *The Stanford Daily,* February 26, 2018, https://stanforddaily.com/2018/02/26/provost-general-counsel-offer-personal-contributions-to-anti-sexual-assault-organization-after-stanford-denies-fliegelman-victims-request-for-donation/.

[19] From the notes I took immediately after my meeting with Stanford's general counsel.

[20] Haven, "Stanford Acquires Late Professor's Renowned Collection of 'Association Copies.'"

[21] "Memorial Resolution: Jay Fliegelman (1949–2007)."

[22] Haven, "Stanford Acquires Late Professor's Renowned Collection of 'Association Copies.'"

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Kyle Wang, "Stanford One Year After #MeToo: How Stanford's Response Failed Victims of Sexual Assault," *Stanford Politics,* June 14, 2019, https://stanfordpolitics.org/2019/06/14/stanford-one-year-after-metoo-how-stanfords-response-failed-victims-of-sexual-assault/.

[26] The silence of Japan on the issue of "comfort women" rhymes with the silence of Stanford English on the rape of my younger self. And both silences rhyme with the silence of South Korea on the rape of Vietnamese women by South Korean soldiers during the Vietnam War — a silence that also rhymes with

the silence of the United States on the rape of Vietnamese women by American soldiers. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of silences that can be added to this rhyme scheme.

[27] "Barbarities of the Enemy," 118.

[28] "Jay's Estimates."

[29] Hutchins, 625.

[30] Cameron Ehsan, Victoria Hsieh, and Kathryn Zheng, "Stanford Removes Library Collection, Brick Honoring Affiliates Accused of Sexual Misconduct," *The Stanford Daily,* July 9, 2021, https://stanforddaily.com/2021/07/09/stanford-removes-library-collection-brick/.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Seo-Young Chu, "Dear Stanford: You must reckon with your history of sexual violence," *The Stanford Daily,* July 12, 2022, https://stanforddaily.com/2022/07/12/from-the-community-dear-stanford-you-must-reckon-with-your-history-of-sexual-violence/.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Emily Van Duyne, "The Impossible, Crucial Task of Teaching About Rape as a Survivor," *Literary Hub,* April 18, 2022, https://lithub.com/the-impossible-crucial-task-of-teaching-about-rape-as-a-survivor/.

SCIENCE-FICTIONAL NORTH KOREA: A DEFECTIVE FUGUE

"The Secret of Frequency A": Eom Jeong-Hui Eom and Ko Im-Hong, "The Secret of Frequency A: An Incredible Disaster," trans. Heinz Insu Fenkl and Jungbin Yoon, *Words without Bor-*

ders, February–March 2011, http://wordswithoutborders.org/graphic-lit/the-secret-of-frequency-a-an-incredible-disaster.

"Cataclysm": Yul Kwon and Deodato Pangandoyon, "Cataclysm," *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology,* ed. Jeff Yang, Parry Shen, Keith Chow, and Jerry Ma (The New Press, 2009), 134.

IMAGINING AN ASIAN AMERICAN SUPERHERO OF NORTH KOREAN ORIGIN: FUGUES IN THE KEY OF HOPE

Don Mee Choi, *DMZ COLONY* (Wave Books, 2020).

Yul Kwon and Deotato Panandoyon, "Cataclysm," in *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology Paperback,* ed. Jeff Yang, Parry Shen, Keith Chow, and Jerry Ma (The New Press, 2009), 134.

"Miss DMZ," Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries (장영혜중공업), 2005, https://www.yhchang.com/MISS_DMZ.html.

Kang Han, *The Vegetarian* (Hogarth, 2016).

James Church, *Inspector O Novels* (St. Martin's Press, 2006–).

Chang-Rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (Riverhead Books, 1995).

Jin-Sung Jang, *Dear Leader: My Escape from North Korea* (Atria, 2015).

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *DICTEE* (University of California Press, 2001).

Cathy Park Hong, *Dance Dance Revolution: Poems* (W.W. Norton, 2007).

Bandi, *The Accusation: Forbidden Stories from Inside North Korea* (Serpent's Tail, 2017).

Richard Powers, *Plowing the Dark: A Novel* (Picador, 2001).

Young-ha Kim, *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* (Harcourt, 2007) and *Your Republic Is Calling You* (Mariner Books, 2010).

Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation, Authority, Acceptance: Southern Reach Trilogy* (FSG Originals, 2014).

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 2012).

Octavia Butler, *Lilith's Brood: The Complete Xenogenesis Trilogy — Dawn, Adulthood Rites, Imago* (Open Road Media Sci Fi and Fantasy, 2012).

William Gibson, *Idoru* (Penguin, 2011).

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Anchor, 2004).

Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games series: The Hunger Games, Catching Fire, Mockingjay* (Scholastic Press, 2008–2010).

William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (Ace, 2000).

David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (Random House, 2004).

"Don't look at the idoru's face": Gibson, *Idoru,* 178.

"Spider Lim slumped over his workstation": Powers, *Plowing the Dark,* 58–62.

Acknowledgments

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- "Translator of Soliloquies" was originally published in *Black Warrior Review* 46, no. 2 (2020).
- "Verblessness" was originally published in *Kartika Review* in March 2017.
- "Generation Hwabyung Telepathy" was originally published as part of a *Testimonial Tapestry in Asian American Literary Review, Special Issue on Mental Health: Open In Emergency,* ed. Mimi Khúc and Lawrence-Minh Davis, 2017.
- An earlier version of "Free Indirect Suicide" was originally published in *The Rumpus* on March 26, 2019, ed. Christine Hyung-Oak Lee.
- An earlier version of "A Refuge for Jae-in Doe" was originally published in *Entropy Magazine* on November 3, 2017. It has also been reprinted in *Best American Nonrequired Reading 2018, Best American Experimental Writing 2020,* and *Advanced Creative Nonfiction* (Bloomsbury, 2021).
- "I, Discomfort Woman" was originally published in *The Margins/Asian American Writers' Workshop* on February 21, 2023, ed. Emily Jungmin Yoon.

- "The 38th Parallel of Living in Ceasefire" was originally published as "Life 38" in *Mithila Review* in 2016, ed. Salik Shah.
- "Fugue in Dream Minor" was originally published in *Strange Hymnal* 2, no. 1 (2026), ed. Maggie Boyd Hare and Morissa Young.
- "Two Koreas in the Key of Emily Dickinson" was originally published in *Newtown Literary* 14 (2019).
- An earlier version of "Science-Fictional North Korea" was originally published in *Deletion: The Open Access Online Forum in Science Fiction Studies,* ed. Marleen Barr, April 2014.
- An earlier version of "Dream Life of Waste" was originally published in *Nat. Brut* 13 (2019).
- An earlier version of "Welcome to the Vegas Pyongyang" was originally published in *Science Fiction Studies* 39 (2012): 376–77.
- An earlier version of "Imagining an Asian American ~~Superhero~~ of North Korean Origin" was originally published (without the strikethrough) in *Asian American Literature in Transition: 1996–2020,* ed. Betsy Huang and Victor Roman Mendoza (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 331–45.
- Parts of the "Epilogue" were published in *Mithila Review* in 2016 (in my poem "What is the maiden name of Frankenstein's creature?") as well as in the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 34, no. 2, ed. Haerin Shin and Sang-Keun Yoo (2023) (in my piece "Excerpts from an Anti-Standardized '수능': A Design-Fictional Approach to Korea").
- "After 'A Refuge for Jae-in Doe': A Social Media Chronology" was originally published in *ASAP Journal* on March 15, 2018.
- "Dear Stanford: You must reckon with your history of sexual violence" was originally published in *The Stanford Daily* in July 2022.

Many thanks to the editors and readers of the publications listed above.

A fellow survivor whom I was going to thank here sent me this important message (which they gave me permission to print anonymously): "please don't name me. i can't risk being associated."

With their words in mind, I will keep the rest of these acknowledgments vague.

Thank you to the ecosystems — literal, figurative, online, terrestrial — who have nourished and accommodated me.

Thank you to my colleagues and students in the English Department and MFA Program at Queens College, CUNY.

Thank you to the editors of punctum books for understanding and believing in my work.

Thank you to my families.

I love you more than any language can express.

Pop Quiz

At What Point Does This Book End?

A. From which Ourself emerge —
B. "Epilogue"
C. "Acknowledgments"
D. Somewhere on this page
E. In the space between this page and your eyes
F. In your brain as you read these words
G. Forever
H. Never
I. The death of the author
J. The survival of the reader
K. What you do with it
L. How you teach it
M. The page beyond the last page
N. Exactly right here
O. Elsewhere
P. The end of the world
Q. Apocalypse
R. Utopia
S. Juche 9,999,999
T. The future, which already exists

U. The past, which will always be part of the present, which will always be part of the future
V. Now
W. This book is constantly ending because of the fourth dimension
X. _____
Y. All of the above
Z. None of the above