

Beloved

The little girl had black hair as dark as paint and almond eyes as warm as rocks on the beach. Framing her internal smile, were her two low pig tails that were braided into loops and tied with satin sapphire-colored ribbon. She lived inside a clock tower that was crowded to its roof in sweets and her big, beautiful dresses. She spent her days perched inside, her view uninterrupted except for the arms of the clock and her long black curls invading her periphery. When she reached outside, she easily grazed the prickles of the jackfruit heavy on the branches and smell the sweetness of the jasmine flowers that wrapped around the tower. Behind her were her stacks of books scattered every which way, all eager to be leafed through by the little girl. And every night as she crawled into bed, she would select her midnight companion from the stacks and read herself to sleep, her plump cheeks illuminated by the moon that had now settled between clock's arms.

Every day when the little girl woke, she was feverishly happy. It was the type of happiness comparable to only the sun. Each of her days were the same, but the little girl didn't mind. She loved her home. She loved the strong scent of *mallipoo*, and a brightness that not even the strongest of storms could hide. She was fond of her nights occupied by late-night mysteries and the world's words. But one night, the clock on her home was lulled to sleep. It was upon its last click, that the little girl noticed the twitching of her clock's arm had stopped. Before she could inspect why, she found a strange grip around her pale throat, a grip so foreign that she had no time for surprise. Instantly the mysterious grasp had suffocated the little girl to sleep. She had fallen asleep so deeply that when she woke, her hair had been painted by dust and her lips with

tar. The little girl woke to find in the place of her books and teddy bear, was a glossy-eyed creature that smiled without stop. In its eyes, reflective from the wet tears of laughter, she saw herself—a not so little girl.

Her eyes mimicked the creature's, but the tears felt different. She sharply broke the trance the creature seemed to place on her and looked around her. She occupied a deep dark room whose only light seemed to glow from the creature's eyes, the magical eyes that seemed to tunnel her into an abyss. This abyss grasped her youth and held it within itself—taunting her just within fingertip reach. The longer she gazed at this creature the more she felt her bones crinkle and her skin crack. The more she noticed her fingernails bending to the draft in the meek room, and her hair fall from her scalp with every twitch. A creature for which despite stealing everything familiar about her body she still seemed to have an intrinsic affection for, a love for. A feeling that could not even be drowned out by the clambering in her head and her internal cries to escape and finally feel light upon her cheeks again.

And through it all her body seemed to perk her up towards the small crack in the low popcorn ceiling of her cell, adding a dimmed light to only its corner. She, still holding this creature she couldn't seem to let go off, contorted her body towards this crack, like a plant arching for the sun. Her hair shed behind her in trails and her bones sprinkled into a path leading toward her. But in her journey to this light, she got lost again into the eyes of this creature. She wondered, staring into its almond shaped dark eyes, why her heart ached. It was an ache so deep, it was comparable only to the moon. An ache only capable of conjuring memories of life beneath the breeze from the jackfruit trees, and the unplanned sweetness that swayed through the air from the nearby

jasmine. And from a force beyond her comprehension, a force as innate as breathing and blinking—she raised this creature into the crack and watched it be swallowed into the light, as the remainder of her bones shriveled into dust, leaving nothing behind but her strands of silver-dusted hair in one muddled lock.

*Tamil work for jasmine (aka. *maligai*)

Conditional

I drink warm lattes to miss you
and eat a chocolate chip cookie,
to think about how you'd complain that everything was sweeter in the States.
I think of you when I sit in the passenger seat
because you would drive me around until I fell asleep.

When it rains, I stand outside
to think about how you wouldn't leave the house.
And even though caffeine makes me a live wire,
sugar churns my stomach,
and the rain poofs my *soan papdi* hair,
I think of you.

Now, I stick out my bottom lip when working on a particularly challenging problem
and your dimple forms when I laugh.
I resemble you when I swallow my tears,
and as I fall silent when I'm sad.

And you, with your quiet demeanor and metal frames,
had flown across the world to the monk on the mountain
to avoid those little pills
because you carefully computed that if I could sleep through the night,
I would go back to being your daughter.

But when they cured my mind, they must have forgotten to reconnect my heart
because now when I think of you,
I think only about how you said to stop crying,
before you gave me a reason to,
as though the puddle at my feet might absorb into your skin.

Every morning as I slip those little pills,
your eyes appear in the mirror,
judging me for succumbing to pain
as I think of the coffee, the mountain, the rain,
and how you love me.
You an angel of the gods,
And me a congenital miscalculation.

Lurking in your image of me,
I hand you a blank check on my being,
as I shelter you from my reality
and relearn how to live.

And still, I could never blame your stern gaze

for I was simply the collateral
of the orange, white, and green of your blood
and the red, white, and blue of mine.

*soan papdi