

S. Qiouyi Lu



2020 RHYSLING PACKET

Website	s.qiouyi.lu
Email	s@qiouyi.lu
Twitter	@sqiouyilu

© 2021 by S. Qiouyi Lu

Preface

This packet gathers all my poetry published in the calendar year 2020. Not all pieces are speculative, but most are, making them eligible for the Rhysling Award. Poems 10 lines and under are also eligible for the Dwarf Stars award.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

—S. Qiouyi Lu

Table of Contents

annihilation	4
bosque	7
Budapest	8
I could watch him unfold.....	15
if you asked me to trace my history, I might tell you:	16
Inside the <i>Ironheart</i>	20
mecha visits little tokyo.....	21
momentane	23
states of matter	24
they would have us disappear	25
A Year to Miss	27

annihilation

43 lines

you were born on the 15
an endless stretch of desert
of desolation
your face a skull

you are here now
beside me
our bodies nestled against each other
like parentheses
like double yellow lines

I lay my head on your stomach
your body speaks only in rumbles
in prayers
in a language I don't know

I smooth the dark thatches of hair
that hide your navel,
the twisted knot of you underneath

who are you?

your flesh echoes the screams
of generations
of a land robbed
of borders that crossed you
of a sun that set on you
on your blood
on the brown of your skin

who are you?

if I cut away your skin
remove epidermis
and yellow fat
I could take handfuls of your entrails,
unravel them like twine
revealing the interstate of you

please, my love
tell me your endless journeys
let me hear them from your raven tongue,
not from my fingers
reading every wet vein of your intestines
like an oracle
begging a silent god to speak

please, my love
talk to me
take the bone mask from your face
look at me with those burning eyes

who are you?

bosque

6 lines

homegrown fruit
bursts tart
fills my mouth
with memories
of burying myself
in your guava musk

Budapest

137 lines

for Lianne

1

You dreamed of this place once
when you were a child, and Budapest
clung to the page of an old book.
That night, you prowled
through cobblestone streets,
through dusty libraries,
and you rested your hand
on a verdigris statue.

Time runs a line through your arms,
straight as the path
from your fingertips to your elbow.
The sun beats down on your shoulders;
roof tiles dig into your heels.

Distance

magnifies the poetry written
in the curls of her hair;

space

reveals the light gilding
her green eyes gold.

(When you were a child and Budapest
was the moon setting over a river,
you didn't think that history
could be something small and intimate.

History to you
was occupations and battles and war;
history was not
damasked walls and sniper targets
and two people who
but for their convictions
mattered nothing to the world.)

You are only a spot against the sky,
but you still cannot afford
to let that sliver of gold
turn whole.

Time bends
and pauses.

2

Her absence
marks her presence.
You realize too late
that you did not catch glimpses of her —
she is the one
who caught you.

3

You meet in a hotel room.
Close combat was never your forte.
She plays you,
you play her;
this is a dance,
each step
a lie raised,
a lie broken,
and your mutual deception
is weapon enough for both of you.

You're face-to-face
when you reach a truce —
she'll let you live
if you let her live —
and what you don't say
is that you're not doing this
out of fear for your life,
but

out of want for hers.

4

It should end there, but it doesn't.
 Instead, a building explodes;
 instead, you're fighting alongside her;
 instead, you meet again, this time at dusk,
 and her language is your language is the way
 tenseness melts is the way her lips meet yours
 is the way the only word either of you needs
 is *yes*.

And this should scare you.
 This, the way she reads your vertebrae
 like a blueprint; this,
 how she infiltrates you, traces paths
 along your jaw, crawls into
 every neuron of you, makes you tremble,
 makes you shiver, as if she's
 researched you – maybe she has – as if
 she knows you, has known you –
 and who's to say she hasn't?

But you lean into her anyway,
 arrow bent by the wind,
 two degrees off target,
 and missing
 has never felt so good.

5

Later, when your mind is not your own, when blue
 your soul is blue, when blue your veins are blue,
 when blue the edges of your pupils sing blue,
 she flashes redder than sunsets balanced
 on the crosshairs of a church spire.

You didn't kill her that time.
 You won't kill her this time.

And *sorry* you want to mouth *sorry, I'm sorry,*
I'm sorry for all this. That touch you craved
 becomes a touch whose destruction you crave
 and *sorry* the bands around your arm
 are too tight and *sorry* your quiver
 presses hard against your back and *sorry*
 you quiver, you quake, and *sorry, sorry, sorry—*

She strikes you,
 splits a red horizon across your mind,
 and blue crashes against your temples,
 scrabbles for a hold, spreads ten thousand wings,
 beats oilslick napes into one shadow.

Your world goes black.

6

this is you this is you this is you
and *this is* a mantra beating
against *your* skull, trembling as if to fill you
with remembrance.

When she is this close, she fades into
the accumulation of familiar shapes.
The one you fell in love with
is the one who is sharp around the edges;
the one with you now
is the one whose boundaries blur,
who smiles, who knows when to free you,
whose words
return you.

She leans into you.
Light dips into the notch of
her cupid's bow.
She pulls back the line of
your lower lip;
her hand cupping your face
draws your entire body taut.

When she is this close,
it's only force of habit
that keeps your eyes open.

You never told her, but she knows —
of course she knows. Her eyelashes flutter
against your skin, paint sparks
along your cheeks, and maybe your eyes
aren't so useless here.

You don't need to know every detail of her
to love her.

The rush of green flooding your vision
as she looks straight into you
is enough.

I could watch him unfold

14 lines

layer by translucent layer
revealing the milk-glow of him

he colors the ocean-dark twilight gold
with the weightless shine of his smile

water & light
pool in his footsteps

gravity & air
pierce continents with rivers

every dimension
passes between our eyes

close them for a moment
and drift with me

timeless revolutions:
the purr of infinity

**if you asked me to trace my
history, I might tell you:**

68 lines

1.

I live in a house haunted
by the skeletons I buried:

my ribcage whistles
like windchimes

2.

this red clay came from somewhere:
washed downstream,
blood from nanjing past wuhu,
rivers polluted until the dissolution of heaven
filtered down through the rocks, opened wrists
into the deltas of shanghai

3.

your deft fingers, strong as wood,
play banjos, ukuleles, guitars, double bass,
strumming songs from
the mountains to the east
through fortune's creation
to an emblem of peace, where you
drink wristwater from my mouth,
my lips touching yours,
dewdropping those naked desert bones,
driving those clattering skeletons north,
pounding through mountains to reach
secret valleys

4.

were chengdu our capital,
maybe we would have been softer,
more amenable to nature

but instead the capital is the northern fortress:
beijing, a city away from the mother waters,
a city on the borders of steppes and deserts,
a stronghold, guarded, walls
cutting through my home, walls
built and torn
through yours

5.

I am eurydice
watching your back —

I am always with you:
through bluebeard hallways,
through salted badlands,

your shadow:
the imprint cast
by your soul

my stagman, hooved and wild,
don't look back —

there is no need:
my footsteps may be soft, but
my love sounds always in answer

through whatever roads we have to carve,
through whatever forests we have to knife down,

the colonel and his shadow,
that dark space mouthing love letters
from fog and smoke

6.

let me give you my soul's beauty:

the world through my body,
through my lungs and my heart,
through my liver, my stomach,
through the marrow of my bones,
through my fat, my skin
trembling under your touch,
a leaf clinging to the last of autumn
before tumbling away,

letting herself fall

letting herself push herself
back up,

ready to rise from the dead
and take the colonel's hand in hers,

two tai ji fists palmed together,
brass knuckles dust-glinting with earth
carved from the ground, excavating
some temporary home

Inside the *Ironheart*

170 words

In the pristine outer hallways, we are uniformed and ranked: Captain. Commander. Lieutenant, ensign. The white illumination inset in the walls mimics daylight; the chrome panels are maximized for utility and efficiency. None of the planets that stream past the windows resemble the blue-green marble we used to call home.

But when we go deeper into the center of the ship, blues and silvers give way to reds and golds, to the last wood paneling we could salvage from the surface. We abandon our uniforms; we kneel on cushions worn with the indentations of so many others before us. Electric joss sticks smolder: we imagine the amber-floral scent that would linger in the air, tracing smoke trails through the half-light of the room to embrace the robes of the Goddess. Here in the gilded quiet, in a world we almost lost, we unite as one diaspora in mourning.

lightyears from Earth
Guanyin still hears
the cries of the world

mecha visits little tokyo

27 lines

I was born steel-reinforced
into mother serenity:
the growl of a metal-frame
mecha waiting to respond
to my exhalations

fetal in a chrome womb
throbbing bass heartbeat

reverse
drive

palimpsest smog and blue
gives way to the haze of distance
outlining sun-faded skylines

I am not a monster here
not a split-brained beast
who finds peace only
in a two-ton death machine

my mind's skinner godzillas
become shadowboxed,
snakes clutched claw-strong
in my harpy talons

here, after I pull up curbside
and park mecha with two hours
on the meter, headlights winking out

I can be anyone
kowtowing sumimasen

little tokyo, float my world
into an ukiyo mask of anonymity

momentane

18 lines

we are etymologies, words crumbling
 and reforming, morph by morph, into scaffolds of
 syntax, the skeleton
 of a lexicon rebuilt.

we determine our semantics. we determine
 how we survive, and what we forget about
 emergencies, darling,
 is that they are nouns: they are single points in time
 derived from actions,
 from something
 emerging.

even the most devastating earthquake
 lasts only a few minutes, is only an epicenter, is not
 an end. we still have
 the aftershocks. we still have the aching hurt of bones
 creaking back together, the unfamiliarity
 of your hand over mine, the soft thrill
 of recovering *yes*. we are not
 emergencies. we are
 the seeing, the merging. we are
 possibilities.

states of matter

11 lines

midnight hour
the boundaries of my body
melt into shadows

headlights limn my hands
turn fingertips magma-red

lightning stars call me home
and I drift again
cosmonaut dissociating from earth

only the memory of your hand in mine,
the weight of your palm against my cheek,
brings me back whole

FIRST PUBLISHED IN *I WANT YOU TO*
SEE THIS BEFORE I LEAVE 20, SPRING 2020.

they would have us disappear

27 lines

they tried it with you
over something as innocent
as your boyish hands
holding oranges
as if you'd captured the sun
but instead of seeing your light
they saw your brown skin
and decided you were
trouble

they tried it with me
my acceptable yellow
enough to offer bridges
to ivory towers full of ceilings
every mirror reflecting absence

they would have us disappear
as if the energy we create between us
isn't a power in itself

but I refuse
I hold a space for you in my heart
where I'll always see your light
where you can be as you are

and you hold a space for me in your heart
where I see myself reflected
so fiercely and vividly
in the fondness shining from
your beautiful
dark eyes

A YouTuber Placed Her Autistic Adopted Son From China With A New Family — After Making Content With Him For Years

Myka Stauffer built her YouTube following partly by sharing every step of her journey to adopt a toddler from China. This week, she revealed why he'd gone missing from her videos.

A YouTuber with hundreds of thousands of followers who has shared her family's experience of adopting a toddler from China announced on Tuesday that she and her husband had permanently placed their child with another family after unspecified behavioral issues.

The announcement has caused a firestorm in social media and within the creator and influencer communities. Many are questioning the ethics of the YouTuber, Myka Stauffer, after she spent years sharing intimate details of her son Husley's life on a monetized channel. Even before her family adopted Husley in 2017, Myka had made his story a key theme on her

channel, which has exploded in popularity and landed her several high-profile sponsorships. She has also positioned herself as an advocate for international adoption in several national news outlets. These posts, crisscrossed with a long-simmering debate about the rights of children, her social media has led to a outcry against the couple and their decision to publicize and monetize their lives.

Myka and her husband, James, who live in Ohio, did not return a request for comment on this story nor did their attorney. The Stauffers have been sharing their life on YouTube since 2014. Myka's channel has 1.5 million subscribers, and the family's channel, The Stauffer Life, has 212,000. When the couple started vlogging they had one daughter together, and Myka had a daughter from a previous relationship. They have since had two sons together, whose pregnancy and births they also shared on their channel.

In July 2016, the couple posted a video titled "BIG ANNOUNCEMENT!! 1 BABY #4." In the video, they announced that they were aiming to adopt a little boy from China. They added they were even considering adopting another child, from "Uganda or Ethiopia," once this adoption went through.

Myka produced 27 videos about their "adoption journey," including a 13-part series of adoption updates. In the series, Myka answered questions about the process of adopting from China and the emotions she felt.

In some videos, Myka plugged a fundraiser she had organized for Husley's unspecified needs. She said every person who donated \$4 would unlock a different piece of a 1,000-piece puzzle, which would, at the end, reveal a photo of Husley that she would reveal to the world. She also said she would write the names of all donors in his baby book.

In a sponsored video from 2017, Myka said she was using her proceeds from YouTube ads towards her son's education, writing in the caption that the sponsorship profits are going to "help bring our SON home from China."

In an article she wrote for Parade, Myka said the Stauffers were told by the agency Husley had a "brain

A Year to Miss

10 lines

a firestorm
the creator questioning life

a nation long-simmering

the right to cry
did not return their life,
births another series of emotions,
every person a puzzle

at the end,
reveal to the world the names of all
using profits to parade agency.