TIDAL CREATURES

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1. The gone things

It is eighteen years before diagnosis, and the words I do not yet know have begun to unspool flesh.

Mind, this is not the story you think it is. The one that says: it came, I conquered, *the end*. That, too, is a form of cancer story, and indeed a fortuitous one. I could tell it like that if you like, and many of us do, quite certainly. Sometimes I feel tougher when I evoke battle, when I say I *bit the bullet* and *fought like my life depended on it* (since, of course, it did). Validation, which is necessary, finds shape in language, which is inevitable. Our metaphors deliver us to where we can begin.

But telling it like a war feels like a gloss and a little dishonest, at least for me, though little cancers like mine still know how to throw their weight around, even when they're gone. Mine is more like a little laughing ghost. *Conquered! Moi?* Memory is the armor of Gone Things, which they use to speak by rattling iron.

The vernacular of Gone Things is primitive, above all else a reverberation. Mine would tell the story a different way.

In this memory, I am four years old. It is September in a Maryland town which had once been Potomac horse country, before the developers came and the farmland receded northward, leaving in its wake a suburbia of manicured lawns, housing subdivisions, morning joggers, and expanded school bus routes. It is the morning of my first day of nursery and the hallway of St. Francis Episcopal Day School smells like early autumn rain. I am afraid to be left alone. There is nothing peculiar about a child wailing into her mother's skirt. The teachers leave me to it.

I must have begun to realize that all entreaties dribbling out of my mouth, and my mother's coaxing words as she strokes my hair, are unintelligible to them. That their soft cooing is unintelligible to me and that we are mutually foreign.

That I, who was born in America, had yet to learn English. Had yet to grasp the fact of language, of Tagalog as speech for inside my house and English as speech for outside. That what has been asked of me was somehow not even mine to offer. Even on the very grounds where my parents were married, and I was baptized, and all three of us would attend Mass every Sunday morning in that room lined with smooth wooden pews and brass chandeliers and fraying hymnals.

Looking back, I can imagine my mother laughing, telling my teachers, "I'm sorry, we'll be a minute," and myself rising to new heights of terror, hearing her use the bizarre tongue on them, concluding that my mother speaking English is not my mother at all. She is an impostor. As if language could bifurcate and multiply a human being and project it into infinity, a land of mirrors. Divine intervention in Babel was equal parts diaspora and confounding of tongues. We no longer know each other. Scattered over the continents, we no longer understand where we are.

On that day, the world pries itself off a girl's skin and shows itself as distinct, no longer a part of her. She has splintered. If coherence demands either the return of the world to a body, or the delivery of a body to the world, then it is a decision made in a single, mundane instant. Suddenly the girl is no longer crying. She hears her name being called and latches on to it. The voice is one she recognizes. The boy, the rector's son and of South Carolina stock, wears a plaid shirt, blue jeans, and a Mexican sombrero over neatly combed blond hair. They are the same age.

The boy leans into the corridor from the classroom, which is raucous, with a hand outstretched to her, who is silent. He waits without speaking but seems to know already the girl will come. She lingers in place, then goes to him. He talks to her and surely it is the first time she imagines what he means. The first time she reaches for unknown syllables, flat and nasal, in order to repeat them. This is how the process begins, the unspooling. From inside the cage of the teeth, it moves outwards. The classroom is bright and smells like rain and construction paper. Beyond the glass window, the pavement darkens with water.

Within a span of three years, the girl will lose her mother tongue. It will be unraveled and pried until loose enough to fall. She will speak perfect English that is part Sesame Street, part schoolyard Pig Latin patois and when she watches home videos of the child who knew only Tagalog —who

would sing "Bahay Kubo" to her Pampangueña grandmother, swaying back and forth—all she will apprehend is a little stranger with a face like her own.

2. Papyrus

The human form, which is not made of language, is a thing of language. Which is to say, we are compound beings. Of flesh and the insubstantial, just as a word is insubstantial but capable of shape and sound and weight. But we already know this, have long ago acted upon ourselves as twofold creatures.

In August 1933, a report from Heidelberg was published by Johns Hopkins University on the medicine and surgery of the ancient world. "If we review the great number of recipes of this Papyrus Ebers," writes German Egyptologist Hermann Ranke. "It seems as if two different principles, fundamentally opposed to one another, here were bound together by force: a common-sense empiric medicine… and an entirely opposite kind of medicine, based on the idea that the diseases were caused by demons and evil spirits, who had to be expelled by the disgusting order of those unmentionable ingredients."

Though he does, in fact, mention them: "blood of a lizard, teeth of pigs or moisture of their ears, the excrement of grown people and children, of asses, antelopes, dogs, pigs, cats and even of flies…"

The vernacular of memory is like a drum, a reverberation. In translating the Ancients we pull the far gone into ourselves, and contain them. The act of translation produces interior space; a chamber into which a slither of the world returns, at once strange and familiar.

To explain the pulse, the Egyptian text of the Papyrus Ebers says: "the heart speaks in all limbs." To diagnose and treat a tumor: "When you see a man who has a tumor on his neck, and both muscles of his neck pain him, and his head pains, and his collar-bone is rigid and his neck stiff, so that he cannot look down on his body, because it is too hard for him—then say: 'He has a tumor on his neck.'… See to it that he applies a salve, and that he anoints himself, so that he may be cured immediately."

Injury by fire, however, requires exorcism. The physician speaks as the goddess Isis and utters, "My son! Horus! There is a fire in the desert! Is

water near?" To which Horus must answer, "There is no water near—there is water in your mouth, there is a Nile between your legs. Come to me in order to extinguish the fire." The papyrus then directs the physician to incant "over the milk of a woman who has borne a boy, as well as over honey and the hair of a ram, and apply it to the burn."

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Once, when I was an infant, my mother dipped me into a bathtub filled with scalding water. She had forgotten to turn on the cold water nozzle, only to remember when I began screeching like a raptor from *Jurassic Park*. Leaping up with me in the crook of her arms, she invoked the Holy Family. She ran to the kitchen, lay me down on the white tile countertop, and slathered butter over my skin. As if I were a parboiled sweet potato, a toothless potato with a toothy dinosaur howl, twisting and shiny, now anointed with a stick of fresh Land O' Lakes and a cry of "Jesusmariajosep!" The butter, chilled by KitchenAid refrigerator air, cooled the burns.

3. Rituals

Papillary carcinoma is what physicians these days would call the easy cancer, the *good* cancer to get— if you are ever going to get it at all— and in a tone that implies a special favor has been arbitrated by the body. Perhaps it is like this: in the roulette of diseases and afflictions there are different levels of unlucky just like there are different circles of hell. And so I think, be thankful. Here, at least, is an organ you can walk away from.

In treatment, the entire thyroid gland of the neck must be removed (see also: extraction of compromised structures), with measures taken to eliminate even its smallest tissue traces (see also: tactical radiation). An isolation room. Pills of synthetic hormone. A plate of lemons slices. Ablutions. Cloudy dreams. After treatment comes the yearly tests, requiring each time a medical diet and injections of radiotracers and lying motionless under a gamma camera that scans for hints of recurrence.

Each round of diagnostics must be followed —and this my mother insists on—by pilgrimage to the Shine of St. Elizabeth Seton and the Grotto

of Our Lady of Lourdes, at the southern border of the Mason-Dixon line, along cornfields and a border of hills. She herself is a doctor, but takes no chances. I must drink water from the grotto, light a candle, and pay my respects to the American saint. Mother Seton, my own mother calls her. To me, she is simply Elizabeth. Neither of us are Catholic but we are close enough and disease naturally awakens the desire to be clean of it, to hunt for rituals that purify and tether.

On the way to Emmitsburg we drive down a stretch of Maryland highway that inspired John Denver to write "Take Me Home, Country Roads." We are nowhere near West Virginia but close enough to Pennsylvania to feel country. It is early winter. We pass a herd of cattle and an Irish restaurant with a four-leaf clover on its signboard. The waitresses have told me their best dish is the homemade soda bread. Whatever is left over they all take home. We pass an antique mall with a red awning, then a seminary, and drive through a tunnel of trees.

We find the spring, which is cold and goes down the throat cold. Next to the spring is a mossy fountain. The water is mottled with drowned insects and fallen leaves and heavy with uncollected coins. I dig into my pocket for a penny. When I throw, it must cut a perfect arc into the air. It must be absolutely silent. I must not speak, not a word.

4. The inheritance of tidal creatures

There is a seaside town in Northern Mindanao that sits at the base of a mountain range shaped like the back of a dragon. It is my mother's hometown, named after the Visayan term *ánod*, meaning "to drift." The word can also mean "to carry off" which an aunt of mine embellishes as "to be carried away by the river flow." She is accurate enough. The first Visayan-English dictionary, published by a missionary in 1934, provides the following context: *The river carried off my land.* Also: *Bamboos for fish-traps are floated down the river.*

The name gestures toward a process that would become inheritance. A weightless crossing of distance, the decomposition of boundaries, and a shift of internal geography. A carving into. A shaping of. The original frontier village had been a place of flood and monstrous current, yet grew as settlers drifted in from nearby Cebu, Bohol, Camiguin, Negros, and Siquijor—that

island, it is said, of fireflies and witches. Migrants brought in by the tide. Creatures of moving water.

Local history maintains that when the inhabitants thought to change the town name to honor its patron saint in 1889, lightning struck down on a day of festival. Thus, they retained the old name. It is perhaps the true name.

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When the mother tongue leaves you, it leaves behind a cavern shaped like itself. So you become lighter, like driftwood. Or flotsam.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines flotsam in two ways. The first being an archaic legal term indicating the "floating wreckage of a ship or its cargo." The second encompasses entropic deviations from a unified body: (a) "a floating population (as of emigrants or castaways)," (b) "miscellaneous or unimportant material," or (c) "debris, remains."

Tell me, how is it that in becoming a floating thing one becomes somehow lesser?

5. 東京 : Eastern Capital : Tokyo

It is two years before diagnosis. I am a university student in Tokyo—a city I cannot fully read and whose signs evade my eyes. I learn the neighborhoods by fragments, from maps I scratch into notebooks, and sleep with dictionaries next to my alarm clock. Sometimes I dream all in words. They fall apart and recombine without a sense of country. When the words are too much I retreat to the highest floor of Komaba Library where, looking out at sunset, I watch the lights of Shibuya blink against the late afternoon sky. Finally, in the dark, the distant skyscrapers disappear. Buildings leave only their windows and the silhouettes of restless beings.

My friends are a motley crew of boys from the dormitory in Mitaka: one of them is thin as a length of straw and a member of the sumo club, another collects coupons and prowls the supermarket with housewives in search of flash sales in the prepared food aisle, and another

likes a girl in my British film class and has me sweep around the desks to learn her name, which is written on the corner of her homework. Gentle, awkward boys who roll their r's and bark like gangsters in the comic books they read, eyes bulging as they growl, "HoRRRRRRaaaaaa!"

Naturally, I acquire their speech patterns. My boyfriend, born in Akita, is a little horrified. Yet he seems to know I cannot yet distinguish the subtleties of the language. Between polite and casual grammar, between male and female expressions. I stumble my way through meaning. He instructs by example— ending his own sentences with a softer, feminine touch with his head tilted to the side, a five-degree angle, or falling so deeply into humble speech that his shoulders begin to stoop and the arc of his spine traces his own diminishing. He shows me the performance of it, how words tug at muscle and skeleton and change the shape our bodies cut into the spaces we occupy.

The body is, in this manner, already a sign.

6. ♋ : The water sign

Cancer—the crab—is a water sign, one of the fainter constellations. I have never seen it before, not the real thing, but I remember the creature's shape from the glossy pages of a childhood sky atlas. The book taught me that one way to understand location is by the position of stars above the watcher. As a child, the long ago arts of navigation captivated me; at night before sleep I'd imagine how it was when the contours of the earth were not yet known, when the vastness of an ocean churned, darkly, in antithesis to a point of origin.

Cancer—the disease—is not new. Writings on the affliction have existed throughout recorded human history. The American Cancer Society notes that fossilized bone tumors have been discovered in human mummies, along with "bony skull destruction" characteristic of cancers in the head and neck. Yet the oldest description is said to have emerged from an ancient Egyptian textbook on trauma surgery which instructs on the excision of abscess-like tumors from the breast by way of cauterization. To burn out the tumors, a "fire drill" would be applied to the puckered flesh of the patient's chest. We have since come a long way.

Cancer—the word—is from the Latin *cancri,* though of ancient Greek origin, and traced to the physician Hippocrates, who employed the terms *karikinos* and *karkinōma* in describing two different forms of tumors, around which the swollen veins would resemble the limbs of a crab. In Old North French the word was *cancre,* and in Middle English became *canker*. Here, linguistically and amid shifts in meaning, anglophones hover near our roots.

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One summer, my cousins and I went crabbing in Tilghman Island, along the Chesapeake Bay. We didn't have traps so we tied bait to nylon strings and dropped them into the water. When the line grew taut, we'd gently pull up and scoop the crab with a net. Not so different from how you'd catch a fish, really. Except the bait. When catching fish, common prey is frequently used, such as worms, leeches, maggots, minnows, frogs, and salamanders. I guess it all depends on the size of the fish.

To catch Maryland blue crabs we use chicken necks.

7. *If not the heart*

The thyroid is a gland shaped like a butterfly. Two wings curl around the trachea, each linked to the other by a strip of tissue called an isthmus. The thyroid, therefore, is at once a delicate creature and a delicate geography, pressed in on all sides by a sea of muscle, ligament, and the vibrations of speech. It regulates the speed at which the cells of the body function and is, internally, also a horsewhip—and therefore a necessary contradiction to its own biological form.

At times I wonder why you love with your heart and not with this. The delicate horsewhip. Perhaps it is not an apt descriptor of love. Perhaps it describes something else, something you can live without. I do not know what that thing is. Perhaps it does not have a true name, just a metaphor.

The body concerns itself little with words, but talks in manifestations.

Genetic patterns had identified my throat as a suspect region, even before evolving into a swelling and then a pathology. My mother, along with

two of her cousins, had been diagnosed with thyroid cancer in their forties. By age seventeen I understood the high probability of inheritance (which would manifest, at age twenty-two, as a biopsy that returns positive) even as I wondered why the men had been spared.

Still, the women of the previous generation survived the ordeal. They were robust enough to laugh, to treat treatment like a vacation. To speed along my mother's recovery we had gone to the beach. The scar which floated above her collarbone reminded me of the coastline of the island where she was born.

The prognosis is known to be favorable but in my early twenties I was young enough to take it personally. It was this savage inside-out feeling. A teeth-gnashing feeling. Like heartbreak, like exile. Cancer is a narrative of trust broken, and cells that corrupt their own natural scripts and say: *gravity alone cannot fasten you to where you are.*

8. Extraction of compromised structures

When treatment begins, I lack my own words for the process. So I examine the patient records where under CLINICAL HISTORY and FINDINGS my body has been dutifully transcribed. My file is a thick one. But the language of medical practitioners is too technical, too layman-cryptic, and so a body no longer healthy is a hieroglyph. Which is not so much a language but its absence. Sometimes it is more comfortable this way. Withholding words from yourself, I mean. Replacing language with procedure.

Yet you cannot speak a procedure. You can only undergo it. You are the object of action, of mirror and scalpel and thread. Of *nurse, please pass me the…* When this happens, what you have beneath your skin becomes the farthest country. It no longer feels yours.

My thyroid is extracted one half at a time, in two surgeries. The first in June, the second in August of 2007. During our first meeting the surgeon told me, "I understand how a woman's neck is important to her, so I promise to keep the incision small. My girl, you will live to a hundred!" as if the beauty of a throat correlated to its lifespan. By that logic, Audrey Hepburn should have lived to five hundred. She had the neck, one would say, of a swan. It was a perfect neck.

My scar is three inches long. A mole lies just below where the right-side incision ends. The surgeon must have considered it a beauty mark. He took care to leave it intact. For me, that mole is a landmark, a border.

9. Tactical radiation

In the oncology ward, iodine-131 is given to me in the form of a capsule. I swallow the pill, sip flat water from a paper cup. The remaining thyroid tissue in my body must absorb the radioisotope and then be destroyed by it, consumed with the passing of each half-life. In the meantime, I am radioactive and something of a biohazard. But these are words I do not tell myself. Instead, they are on the walls and doors and the trash bins. I must take care to use:

I am ☢ and something of a ☣.

A nurse leads me to an isolation room where I must stay until my radiation levels have fallen. This is for the protection of others, their own healthy cells. A red line of tape has been placed on the floor. Those entering the room are allowed to reach that line, but cannot cross. They must not stay long. Little children and pregnant women are forbidden, as if I were a creature plucked from an old wives' tale, craving blood and viscera. Always hungry. I am in isolation for three days.

With every meal I am given a plate of lemon slices to increase saliva flow and reduce radiation exposure to the salivary glands. I rip pulp from rind with my teeth. I gulp down hospital water to flush my system, and pace the walls to bring down a body temperature now touched by fever.

My sweat is radioactive, and my spit, and my hair. I take scalding showers (*My son! Horus! There is a fire in the desert! Is water near?*) and imagine phosphorescent steam rising off skin.

I sleep lightly and dream of Geiger counter static, like the sound of burning oil in a cast-iron pan. I dream of not being here, solitary. Outside my hospital window is a pale November sky scoured clean by wind. I think, *how nice it would be, to be clean like that, scraped hollow.*

10. Farther shore

Recovery is a kind of return, and supposes health a cyclical matter. But when you lose a chunk of body, there is no homecoming. Only debris—which is not the thing that leaves, but the thing left behind. Meaning: the flotsam is what's left of you, who have now arrived.

Which is to say, hello. Which means, welcome.

11. Coherence

If coherence demands either the return of the world to a body or the delivery of a body to the world, a piece of flesh gone is already a clearing. Ground of ash and loam, still exhaling the heat of what it had been.

The autumn I turn twenty-four, after graduating from university, the Japanese government hires me as a civil servant on a specialist's visa. They send me to a landlocked prefectural office in a city enclosed by mountains and peach orchards and vineyards; a basin entered by way of tunnels. There are instances, between one side of the pass and the other, when the weather parts. From rainstorm you emerge into a cloudless day. A dome of sky. For me, nine months after the isolation room, still raw, that is what it is.

Mostly, I am a translator. It is a quiet job, monkish. I have brought my old dictionaries, dog-eared and penciled. Added to them is a dictionary of the electronic sort, with screen and keyboard and monochrome casing. At my desk, hands smudged with printer ink, hunched, I stitch words from words, rendering local maps, tourist pamphlets, assembly speeches, and letters with the governor's seal into English. I stitch these into myself, like ribbons, the tails of a kite which stabilize its frame.

Because there is a strange comfort to be had in dealing with a tongue that is neither mother nor adopted, but acquired by choice, and the diligence of years. When it decides to make a home inside you. Then binds and pushes out. How strange a comfort, for this exoskeleton to hold fast. Even when shambling through lexicon for a way to contain a thought not yet fully formed, mass indeterminate, because a word not yet known becomes a moment that waits patiently, tenderly, for the body to step into it.

12. Tether

I live in a Showa-era government housing unit at the base of Mt. Atago, which creaks with age inside a canopy of trees. The lot where the apartment building stands had once been a bamboo grove behind a temple. When the war came, the Americans firebombed the city. The temple is gone now but a few Jizo statues survive, tended by the neighborhood. A small roof has been built to shelter them from the rain.

Every morning on my way to work I pass them on my bicycle, and a Buddhist cemetery on a hill and an orchard of pears. At the city center is a park built around the ruins of a castle. Standing above, on a rise, is the planetarium. The sidewalk is damp with soap suds from the day's first washing and when the skies are cloudless to the south, Mt. Fuji becomes visible. Postcard perfect. Did you know? One way to understand location is by the position of the mountain relative to where you stand. Here, there is nowhere where the mountain isn't. We live, always, tethered.

The International Affairs Division is a room of tethered people. We dress in the color of moth wings, our sweaters fraying at the elbows. Our desks are adjoined and face each other in two rows. We are a clacking of keys, the groan of broken chairs, the clink of ceramic cups filled with tea brought back from a business trip to Szechuan. To conserve energy, we switch off the lights during lunch hour and turn them back on to the strains of "Edelweiss" floating out of the PA.

We stretch our backs and awaken our sleeping computer screens. Because the city is small, we know each other's business—who has a jealous wife, a child with dwarfism, polyps in the intestine, a casual mistress, ailing parents, a cancer freshly treated—but we do not speak of such things. Only build a roof over them, with the lightest of touches, and without nails.

One morning, I walk into the office just as snow begins to fall thickly outside. It is the first snowfall of the year and I had been out of town, in a colder region of the country. As I brush the flakes out of my hair, my boss tells me, "It has followed you home."

13. Cipher

The Japanese language is, I believe, both by custom and construction, oblique in its methods of conveying a thought. Rather than a direct landing upon the shore of an idea, circumnavigation is what brings us there.

Consider the preambles of Japanese written correspondence which are inflected, at least traditionally, by the circular movement of seasons. Time as feeling, and as physical sensation. Nature as a cipher of desire, shaped into the marked procession of days. We can begin with what is gone, or what is leaving. Zero is a shape that leads always to itself.

In April we write of falling cherry blossoms that are radiant to the eye, and in June, the early breezes of summer, a nostalgic blue sky that reveals itself when rain clouds drift away from each other. If sending a letter in the month of November, one might begin: *the autumn deepens, and it has become a season of yearning for the sun…*

14. Vintage

In 1986, the South Florida *Sun Sentinel* published a glossary of terms one might apply in the appreciation of wine. The *body* indicates "the feel of a wine in the mouth, tangible to the tongue." A wine that is *nervous* on the palate is "vigorous and fine," while one that is *hard* is "austere, without much charm." To remark that it is *complex* points towards "scents within scents, suggestive of many different analogies with fruits…flowers…or nuts."

But to grasp the valuation of wine, with its tilt towards pleasure, is a personal challenge. Because the question of disease is typically met with a utilitarian answer. The functional serves to reduce. Rooms swabbed with antiseptic are where the senses harden, shrink, and turn brittle. Therefore, this matter of *body*, for me, already manifests as physical surplus. I cannot imagine feeling more than I do, or being more than I am.

Except that north of Mt. Fuji, where I am, is wine country. In the weeks leading up to the Grape Festival, I am translating nothing else. Wine labels. Oenology reports. Competition charts. Magazine articles. I sit in meetings with vintners who tour me through their facilities. We walk past

the hydraulic wine presses and fermentation tanks and into the cellars. They have me drink.

This is what comes of the harvest and pressing and fermenting, the aging and blending and fining, they explain. This is an art. This is *process.* Lightheaded, I squint through my glossaries and puzzle through the journey of a grape. How a thousand years ago, the seeds which would evolve into the Koshu variety arrived in Japan from the Caucasus, having crossed Central Asia by way of the Silk Road.

In the act of translation, I begin to read taste as an act of distance. Even the names of the valley wineries speak of crossing, that familiar arc of passage—L'Orient, Grande Polaire, Mars, Sun River. I know *this* taste, can find myself inside. And I remember my mother's story of the young Japanese carpenter who appeared one day in her hometown, on the western shore of Iligan Bay.

It was early in the century, long before she was born. She spoke of how the carpenter married her great-aunt, and how the children of the town would gather around his workbench, collecting the paper-thin wood shavings to press against their heads. They would pretend to be blonde and American, like the Catholic missionary who read from his leather Bible while pacing the churchyard, under a guava tree, his white robe catching blades of afternoon light.

Of how this carpenter, when the Imperial Japanese Army began their occupation of the Philippines, threw himself on their mercy and begged for the town to be left in peace, and how, curiously, his request was granted. "From the church, when your grandmother was married," my mother said to me. "They could hear the echo of artillery fire. But they knew it would not reach them."

Our words deliver us to where we can make landfall.

A body can furl open like this too, and bear itself, after having come so far. The skin of the Koshu grape is thick, bitter, and luminous.

15. Complex

Here is something, for once, that goes down warm.

Mornings when I step out on my balcony and see my breath in the air and snow over the mountains. Unhurried, I take down my clothes from the laundry line, the fabric tough from the water leaving it and the wind pushing through. From the vineyards, the scent of smoke. Dead leaves burning. Grilled fish from a neighbor's kitchen. The air is flavored with winter and is not empty. The naked trees of Mt. Atago scrape their branches against the windows. The click of gears from a passing bicycle, and the beating wings of a crow. Senses upon senses.

New Year's Eve, quarter to midnight. The iron bell of a Buddhist temple hums and echoes against the dark hills. I listen from my living room, wrapped in layers of blankets, eating mandarin oranges. The bell is rung one hundred and eight times, ticking off the worldly desires of man, the root of human suffering. Each strike is a cleansing. I think: I will take it. I reach for my coat, head outside. I greet my neighbors. Children race with flashlights and we are wakeful shadows along a hushed street. The temple, when we arrive at the gate, is brightly lit. Sweet rice wine in paper cups is pressed into our hands. Close to the bell, the sound of it reaches into the bones.

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