

MANHATTANED

Two burly Russian guards at the door.

They usher me in.

Munna and Pongkhi are outside. They have left me.

I don't belong.

How many apartments? I ask, making small talk.

The small of his eyes lights up egg white
He stays silent.

The other one speaks. Twenty four. But the other twelve
are through the other door. From the other street. One
building two gates. Just like America.

Guard one sniggers.

Ah I sigh as I remember the other exit from another life
When I finally find
What stopped me from finding out the first time.

The only time the never time.
There were no guards, no gatekeepers then.

I am taken up a lift. An old one. Hundred years old.

I am here

 To see Madame X.

 I repeat.

 I repeat. Madame X.

In case they don't hear me.

In case

They take me to Monsieur Y.

 Who I

 Don't see, don't want to see.

Madame X waits for me, with a swollen tooth.

I make small talk. Why am I here? It lasts an hour.

The sun on my face it hurts my eyes.

I shield - my - eyes - with my hands. When I talk, I forget
what I say.

Munna and Pongkhi

Must be outside.

Why am I here?

She asks me

Have you seen Accra?

I have seen Akkaba I say

Remembering Lawrence of Arabia.

Munna texts: are you marrying her?

Finally I leave. The sun down.

The Russians at the door remember me.

I wait this time.

Tie my laces take two deep breaths.... talk to...the walls...
wear perfume,
I am on my way

To meet the queen next.

I try looking
As if I come every day. My beat. On 52 nd Street. I could
rap my way out.
Instead, I take photographs.

I will never return. I know this-is-another-pitstop-in-
this-journey-without-reason-or-destination.

I walk round and round the building, looking for nothing.
The first explorer to get lost on Google maps. 21 st
century.

Then I meet them. Kuki has also joined them. They are
sipping something cool.

Inside
a
Restaurant.

They look distant, not the ones who left me at the door.
They are changed.

Dressed in the sheepskin of my thoughts, man from
orient, inside the occident
Where everything is a straight line, a right angle.

No wonder people walk in circles.

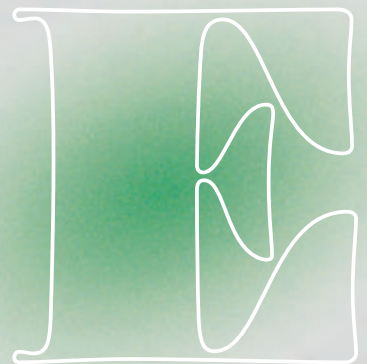
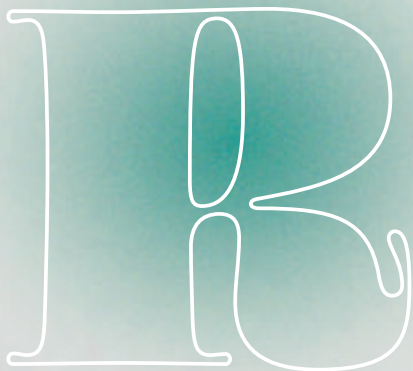
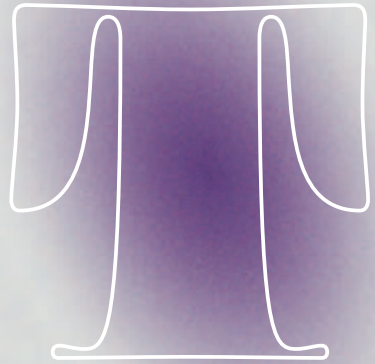
They are smiling at me. Munna and Pongkhi tell me

I have arrived in America. ■



No wonder
people walk
in circles

the intersection of fashion & culture



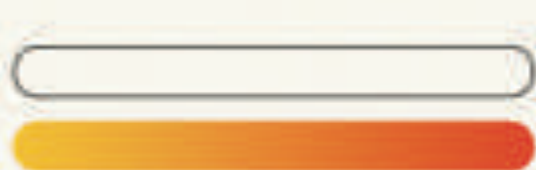
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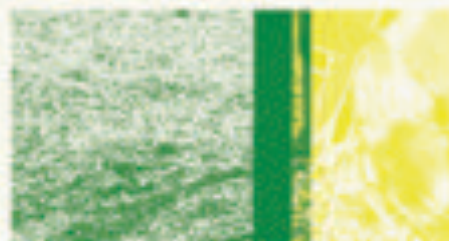
Dolapo Adedokun and Nikodimos Sendek







THE
Children
**WERE ALWAYS
THERE**



THERE EXISTS A WORLDLINE WHERE SOMEONE DIDN'T CARVE

a swastika & the n-word on a dresser

in a schoolyard.

“Surprise inside,” it said. “Open me.”

We didn't because it was

a bomb threat.

I escaped my history exam

but not history.

& this is the crazy shit:

It was 2014 & South Florida & 20% white.

Nestled in an
immigrant haven.

(Or, as much as we'd get in the south anyways.)

We were the teens

who jumped the fence

to run,

not from the not-bomb,

but from the idiot who dangled
a finger over the trigger.

Four years later, a nearby school was shot up.

A TOURIST FROM AMERICA







“What do you mean you don’t know the address you’re going to?” A security guard behind the plastic divider scrutinizes my passport as I stand before him in the ‘foreigner’ line at the Shanghai Pudong Airport. I’m in pajamas and glasses, forehead greasy from the 16 hour flight.

“I’m going to my uncle’s house in the city. He’s picking me up at the airport. So I don’t know the address. He’s waiting right outside.” My explanation comes out clunky—bursts of accented phrases separated by pauses to search for the words I’m looking for. I feel dumb: from jetlag, from my inarticulacy, from not knowing anything about Chinese addresses.

I’m sent to the side of the line to figure out my address. A line of businessmen, families, and tourists shuffle past me. I call my dad, waking him up in the middle of the night so he can text my uncle for his address (I can’t read or write Chinese). In my first hour in Shanghai, my dad in America speaks with my uncle, less than 100 feet away from me, because I can’t speak for myself. In my first hour in Shanghai, I’m alone.



On our second night in Beijing, my friends and I go to a restaurant in a mall. We sit around a circular table, scanning the pictures to look for dishes we recognize from family dinners at home.

We have a discussion about how to say—do you have any recommendations?—in Chinese. Six years of Saturdays spent in Chinese school have amounted to nothing. When the waiters come, we point to the menu and ask them to read it for us. We explain: we're from America and we can't read it, but if you read it to us we can understand what you're saying. They humor us.

We order a long series of cocktails, and finish with a round of drinks called the B-2, made with baijiu. When we order, the waiters ask us twice to check if the girls at the table are sure we want them too. They arrive, and the waiters stand by our table, watching us curiously as we take the shots.

Hao bang!



In Lijiang we stay in the ancient city, in the middle of knotted cobblestone roads lined with street vendors hoping to sell overpriced crafts to tourists.

In Lijiang, I buy:

-two sterling silver rings. My friend helps me talk the price down but bargaining is foreign for both of us and feels awkward. I'm sure we're shit at it.

-a lot of lamb skewers. One night we get drunk and stumble through the streets yelling about yang rou chuan. We find them in a food court and sit at a booth, using napkins as plates. The vendors laugh at us for being drunk, teasing us to try the bug skewers.

-matching phone cases. Fake wooden backs with chinese script carved into them. The two sellers ask us:

“Where are you guys from? Your Chinese is so bad”

“We’re visitng from America”

They looked surprised. “But you look so Chinese!”

“We are Chinese—but we’re from America.” ■

COMPUESTA
DE RECUERDOS,
EMOCIONES,
Y
AMBICIONES

Soy la experiencia humana, compuesta de
recuerdos, emociones, y ambiciones.

IN MOTION

I was born a star of sunshine,
a mesh of unbounded colors
coalescing onto one another.
I was born beyond words.

The body is an artwork,
crafted by improbability and
defined by complexity.
I believed beauty was intrinsic.

But beauty is nothing more than a metric,
an approximation of the human composition.
I was a flower, uprooted and foreign—
my petals incited confusion, not admiration.

I wanted to understand my design,
to appreciate my existence for its uniqueness;
I needed to learn about who I was,
so I could prove I mattered.

I was reduced to words:
Mexican, güero, spic, gringo.
My canvas overwritten by
the vernacular of others.

I hoped to find the right words
to outline my existence, to erase
my uncertainty, to explain to others
who I am.

I stopped searching for terms and definitions.
I am not an entry in a dictionary or a census.
Soy la experiencia humana, compuesta de
recuerdos, emociones, y ambiciones.

I cannot describe the beauty in my petals,
but I have learned to admire them regardless.

▪

A
SENSE
OF
BE
LONG
ING