

Hey Jude

By Leslie C. Lin

I awoke this morning, in the midst of yet another fresh April rain, to find your letter lying quietly by the bottom of the stairwell. I tucked the letter inside my thin spring jacket, brought it back to my room, boiled a kettle of water and made tea, put on Hey Jude, our favorite music to make love to in the darkest of night. With the disk spinning soundlessly in the background, the fine rain falling endlessly in a world a little far away from the one we lived in, I carefully cut the envelope open, flattened the pages out on my lap. It took me some time to prepare myself to read the words that you had sent me, written me, chosen for me from a distant land, the one that claimed to have the sun rising above the land of the people every morning, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, without fail, not a day of betrayal.

In your letter, you told me how you had been these days, the amusing English mistakes your students made in class. They could never seem to pronounce the word “election” right. It had never been easy to refrain from laughing out loud in every class debate. No, no, it’s presidential election, not presidential erection. You laughed in your letter. I could almost see the uprising corners of your mouth being forced into an awkward smile. You did that every time I tickled you after we had come inside of each other. No, no, I am not ticklish. It’s wasted effort. You would say, waving your hands in mid-air in a room overflowing with the scent of sex, gently pushing me aside, beneath you.

I pictured you, sitting by the window of the school café, with an empty plate of curry rice, half drunken miso soup, and some leftover pickles, writing frivolously to me, a letter specifically addressed to me. At night, you would sleep with a nameless Japanese girl. You wouldn't remember her name, if she had freckles on her flawless skin, the length of her colored hair. You promised to call her when she was picking up her scattered clothes lying around your apartment, when she got dressed, when she drew the contour of her eyes the color of the starless sky or painted her eyelashes dark, but you never did. You said you were lonely. You needed the warmth of a woman's soft body. It didn't matter who. It wasn't love.

Midway through your letter, I got out of the bed and filled the bathtub with hot steaming water. A hint of lavender filled my nostrils as I crawled in the bathtub. Enveloped by the flowing water, I drew my legs close to me, resting my head on my knees. I then lit a cigarette for watching the smoke rising above the surface of the water, imperceptibly melting into the surrounding steams. Intertwining your long legs with mine, we applauded the beauty of life for simple pleasures like this: sharing a drag in the hot bathtub after some intense lovemaking to the melodies of The Beatles.

With me lying on your chest, curiously playing the several strands of wet hair encircling your nipples, you would start humming Hey Jude in the middle of the night. Time moved slowly. Only that coarse voice of yours echoed across the white bathroom walls. You said the world had gotten too ugly, too difficult to live in. You drew me closer to you. I am your only comfort, you would say. Holding my breath, I dived into the water where lay your long and

beautiful legs. I wanted you to feel my warm and moist breath enclosing you, my straight and jet- black hair sweeping across your bellybutton, my tongue gently playing and tasting you, again and again. I wanted you to feel the warmth, the closeness that I had felt about you that night. Under the starless sky, I wanted you to remember.

The disk continued spinning in whole blackness. Here and there. On this side of the planet. On your end of the world. In your high-rise apartment in the city of Osaka, where the sun sets at six twenty-five sharp, soaking everything the color red, orange, and yellow. I pictured you once again, holding her hand tight, watching the Japanese sunset and humming Hey Jude by her ears on the tiny veranda you had described in your last letter. She giggled. She didn't understand the words. She didn't understand you most of the time. But it didn't matter. It hadn't been love to begin with.

In this letter, you wrote you missed me. Very much, you said. You often thought of me, the way I tilted my head slightly when I was confused, my cold, tiny hands, my accented English. One of these nights, you would hold onto her, thrusting yourself into her, her warm and moist opening. She left red and purple traces of her painted nails on your back when you came inside of her, again and again, whispering my name soundlessly, repeatedly under the cherry trees and the white soft Japanese moonlight. Petals of the cherry blossoms fell tenderly, breathlessly on your shoulders, gathered by your feet. You hadn't noticed them. Your slender fingers lay on her cold and flawless skin. You only saw the faint purple eye shadows glittering in the dark.

I miss you. I wanted to say. I pictured us under the piercing summer sun, rolling around on the freshly mown grass by the River. I could still feel your big sweaty palm holding onto me, guiding me home in a neighborhood seemingly out of place for me. Desiccated leaves crumbled fiercely underneath our feet. The faint scent of tobacco lingered on my fingers, fading away slowly, reluctantly after you had been gone. At night, I watched you move into me gently, the sweat on your forehead dripping, covering my pale breasts. The glitters on my purple eyelids shone in whole blackness.

I missed you, you and your Hey Jude spinning endlessly in the background.

I woke up sometime later in the bathtub, alone, cold. The water had gone weary a long time ago. The rain had stopped. The sky remained dull. And I, I had dropped your letter into the bathtub. The half-read letter from you, each word carefully chosen and formed into sentences that meant something to you on your end of time, blurred, smeared into something incomprehensible to me on the other end. With the chilly April wind tearing the city, time continued moving slowly. Only shreds, pieces of your dampened pages sent, specifically addressed to me from that far-off world of yours floated on the surface of the cold, cold water, staining the water in the bathtub the color of your transparent eyes.