

Kura

Hanna Chau

God, what am I doing here? The people seem to be in love with the sound of their own voices. The sky is threatening to turn black. Across from where I am sitting, a man with one eyebrow looks at me suggestively and motions towards the entrance of the bathroom. A river of spit dribbles down the left side of his mouth and he licks his lips.

Everywhere I go, it's the same. Different cultures, different personalities but it's still the same. Can you hear me? Do you care? Does it even make a difference? Mother told me my purpose before I was even ten years old. "Kura," she told me, her gray hands stroking my hair, "you are it. You are the one to keep our story alive. Even when your body decays, your words will live into the future. The promise of immortality." But our world, my mother's and mine, was much too small. So she got down on her knees (though not in prayer) and closed her eyes and thought only of me. Now I am here.

The people here have darker skin and talk with their hands. They are friendly even when I cannot understand most of what they say. I spend the afternoon half-heartedly reading my book then take the bus back to the hostel later in the evening. Samra greets me at the door. Her eyes are always watering and empty and it is dangerous if you look into them too long.

When I first told her I was an aspiring writer who was travelling as much as I could to learn more about humans, she threw her head back and gave a cackle. "You're too young, Kura. Too young to know that the world has many more beautiful, magnificent things that

are far worth writing about than humans." Samra got into an accident when she was eleven years old. That's what she calls it, an accident, a slight mismanagement of fate, but everyone here knows that her stepfather tortured and raped her until she turned eighteen and left. The one time I brought it up, we were both drunk and she wiped her mouth and shrugged her shoulders and said you can get used to anything if it happens to you enough. She has nightmares every night where men peel off her skin with a razor blade and inhabit her body. She screams really loud and the other kids always complain.

"So. Did you learn anything new about the human condition today?" Samra asks.

I shake my head and get ready to take a shower. There were no towels here and I didn't bring my own, so I often had to use an old t-shirt to dry off. I fished one out of my bag and grabbed my toothbrush out of the side zipper. Keenan was using the washroom when I opened the unlocked door. Luckily he was finished and already washing his hands.

"All yours, miss" he says in his high falsetto voice.

He calls everyone miss or mister even if they're younger than him. He is the only one who shares his snacks and the only one who doesn't complain about Samra's nightmares. He has scars all along the back of his neck in the shape of a turtle. He calls it his pet and we always laugh at the joke, even Dane who seldom laughs at anything. Dane sometimes takes it a step further and would softly pat the turtle and ask if Keenan had fed it yet and to make sure it doesn't run away because he once had a turtle that ran away and he didn't give a shit what

anyone else said, he was sure that it ran away because it left a note and we would all laugh and shake our heads.

After my shower, I open my copy of Vonnegut and hope to catch up on the next few chapters before Dane arrives. It's too late. I could hear him in the front door, loudly stomping his boots on the mat and making an unsuccessful attempt to be quiet. It was almost past midnight. I bookmark my page when he comes in the room and drops his bag next to my bed. His eyes are blood red and he smells like ashes.

"Morning sunshine! I'm feelin' good today! Let's go play some chess or something!"

Dane gets high about six times a day. The only reason they haven't kicked him out is because of some connections he has with the business. There was talk about his family having money, good money, but it was impossible to get to know Dane. No one knew why he was in a hostel if he was rich, and why he wears those clothes Samra calls "hobo-y." A lot of the others are scared of Dane but I am not. I think this is the reason he confides in me from time to time. The rare times that he is sober, he tells me of the things he has done. When he was fourteen, he ran away from home. He said he felt like an alien, like someone plopped him in some random house in the middle of nowhere with strangers who stitched on whatever face they were going to wear that day and talked in robotic voices. He said that he punched a guy in the supermarket while waiting in line one time because he felt like it. He stole, cheated, lied, and almost killed a girl because she didn't call him back after two dates. There are worse things, I know there are, but I don't ask. He was

surprised the world hasn't decided to kill him off yet.

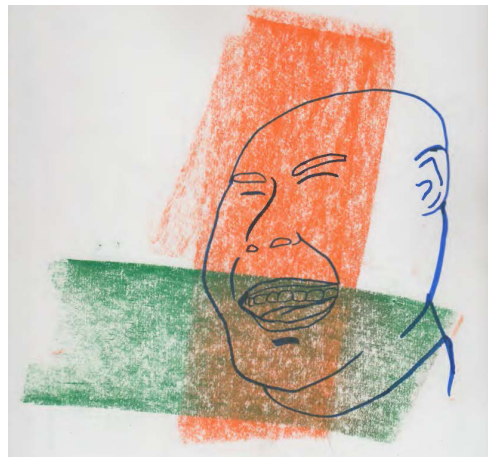
"C'mon, just one game! Trust, Kura, I've gotten better. I know your strategy now. Just one game."

We play three matches until his eyes get heavy as the drugs wear off.

"Tell me, man. Why do you wanna know so much about stuff? About the world, about people, all that stuff. It's all pointless, so why bother? Like shit, s'notgonna make much of a difference anyway."

I shrug and tell him what my mother told me countless times. That I do not exist, that I was just a shell, an instrument whose only purpose is to record important things about this life for the future generation to learn from. That my life exists only in other peoples' stories and it is my purpose to find out what those stories are. That he should not think of me as Kura, a person, but a narrator, a figure who stands apart from the real world and merely observes it.

He thinks about this for a moment and opens a can of pop. "Wow," he says. "That's really fucking sad."



Mirth by Kitty Cheung