

CHINATOWN

Leanne Dunic

First, there were them, and them, and them. Then more. Faces mixed. Sepia, camel, chestnut, and caramel. A pocket here, a clan there. Whole communities disappeared.

And now there is me. I will draw you some maps.

Birthmarks: some have vanished, but then again, nostalgia distorts.

Sometimes I forget I'm Chinese. That I'm not.

Elementary school. Small town of white kids, a community of First Nations. Recesses were inquisitions. *Are you Indian?*

Unclear what exactly *Indian* means. Barely understand *Eurasian*, a word my mother taught me while holding a globe, pointing to the ridges of Yugoslavia, the mass that was China. Europe. Asia. Europe Asia. Canada. Eurasian. You.

Mother, disowned by her own for marrying a white man.

My brother doesn't look distinctly Asian or European, though he has our paternal grandfather's long lashes and solemn eyes.

(Those halfers are always so good looking.)

In America, passersby call my brother Elvis, cops call him spic.

His friends call him Chinatown.

His interests: the car he drives, the girl on his arm.

The girl on his arm will never be Asian. *They remind me too much of you.*

Multiple times I tried to kill my brother, hands around his throat, kicks to his stomach and groin.

Now, we've grown.

I'm amused by the growl of my brother's Ferrari, the one he purchased a week after totalling his BMW, calling me at midnight from the hospital crying *I don't think I can ever drive again.*

But here he is, 23 years old, with the shiny red car he's wanted ever since he was young.

The Ferrari was trailered from California to British Columbia. It's never seen a day of rain in its life and he intends on keeping it that way so he buses to work.

I have recurring dreams of driving a manual transmission. Of revving engines.

On sunny days, my brother picks me up in his Ferrari, the engine vibrating the windows of my home. I bend to get into the low car. He accelerates before my seatbelt is latched and I shriek: half irritation, half thrill. He stops hard, turns fast. The more upset I get the more he laughs.

At Granville Street, he nearly hits a pedestrian trying to cross. I scold him. He gives me his pouty I'm-sorry-sister look but I'm furious. I fear his death, his belief that he won't live beyond thirty. Inside I scream: don't you know how much I love you?

When we still bathed together, my brother showed me his baby-skinned erection. *This means I love you.*

I dwell in the Chinatowns of port cities. Victoria to Vancouver, stints in Singapore, Kobe, Yokohama, San Francisco, Seattle. No answers are found, only red and gold plastic decorations and the question, *Is your mother Chinese?*

They never ask if it's my father who's Chinese.

I'm having dim sum, come join me?

I take the bus to meet my brother and he's already polished off a steamer of sticky rice and two orders of beef balls. One shrimp dumpling remains in the bamboo steamer. *Hargow?* he offers.

I'm allergic to seafood.

Oh yeah. His lips are greasy. His wallet sits among a pile of napkins. *My Ferrari caught fire, waiting for a flatbed to arrive. Shumai?*

When I was a kid, my relations shopped at the same butcher in Chinatown. Mounds of pig ears, chopped red and sticky, brown-paper-wrapped. Chestnuts, pomegranates, pomelos. Bins of autumn produce, bull-like caltrops (poisonous if you don't cook long enough). Wicked, bovine fruit. Crunch chestnuts. Pig cartilage. Stew hard. Bone broth.

Nourish body, nourish spirit.

Chinatown Supermarket on Keefer is permanently closed. You wouldn't recognize Main at Georgia, and did you hear about the viaduct? Kam Gok Yuen was taken by fire. The shop on Gore that sold cherimoyas and holy basil disappeared after rent increased. On Pender: currywurst, oysters, coffee, skateboards. An uncertain future. Even New Town Bakery had a facelift. Displacement is a pattern, not a single occurrence. Goldstone is still there with its oversized clock, and of course, the Gardens and the tourists they bring. Yes, there'll always be tourists.

I will write Chinatown a poem, a love letter.