

uncomfortable

For the tens of thousands of women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War 2 (known as “comfort women”), and the few remaining survivors fighting today. Your bravery is electrifying.

Sometimes we play dead because the others already are and we'd better catch up. It's not easy because the cheap crystallized vinyl of our souls are stapled to our eyes where we watch the silk scream against their hands. They can be very blunt, you

know. Very Stockholm. They teach us card games, too, knuckles littered over the floor, but I think they forget that we learn more about victories when they're feeding us their cowardly, angled legs.

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In the space between breakfast and the sky there is a lilt and there I pretend that I am them: I play card games with them, teach them, and I yank their sliding silvery souls and feed it back to their ears where they cough. And then they clench

the flesh above their lungs and plead like pink-nosed rabbits and I laugh. I hug them until their ribs are xylophones, tell them they're *gonna be okay, okay?* Her limbs coil in arches and her dress is dyed with the scattered cacophony of our howls.

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They frown when they see the dried-up, ruddy bracelets festooning her arm in halos. I can taste her prayers in the back of my teeth just by looking at them. Later that day, they bring a doctor into her room, his pleated eggshell gown drenched with excitement. We all remember his generic hunger.

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I have a factory in the small pause hanging below my heart: I built it there when the soldiers wrestled me from my summer and told me I would be working to cover our debt. Sometimes I stand there, steaming the uniforms free of speckled brown

protests from the Earth. Or screwing beeping parts together to form bits of bugs. Maybe I stir pots, shirking the steam that buoys up from below. I have two pairs of pants: I rotate them every day, even though one is clearly nicer than the other.

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One night I find a rat scabbling under the panels and scoop its warm hiccuping body up and name it Hui-Mang². The syllables bumble against the walls. I hear a knock and glance back, and when I turn around its fat body dissolves in my sight.

My fingers curl in matted craving.

¹ A Korean consonant that closely resembles the Japanese letter for “person” (人).

² Hope.

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Some of them find it funny, hands hovering over their sneers. I want them to take off their boots—they clunk, and each hard-set step has my heart on their ankles. *Slap*. Blasted thunder, packed into spheres. Footsteps, that's what they're called, the tar in my dreams. Not one, not two, but a murder.

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I'm home and my mother shrugs her shoulders away from me even as I ease her into a skintight embrace. Her mouth looks like the time she told me that I couldn't go to school because I had to take care of my brothers, but her eyes are much worse. She stares at a spot above my left cheekbone and I pretend my gaze meets her there. She grabs my only dress, the one I brought and broke, and tosses it into the fire where it goads the carnivorous yellow wisps. It smiles in tinny compliance.

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They used to dip me in chemicals and watch as mint fluid crept up my toes. But they forgot to wring me out, so I'm a hazardous shade now, laden with lungs too little to blow. He asks me about his sons and I tell him that I think they'll have three eyes. He's confused but I blink and his slippery greed is on my abdomen—I wriggle—he lunges—wrenches my arm away—and I flounder like a frog, gutted on the floor with a pole through its breath, stolen in gasps.

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She asks me if the days ever rub my scars in a possessed ferocity, rub and rub and rub relentlessly. I tell her that the seconds have wrapped roots around my pelvis and sometimes they tingle and sometimes they've a needle sheen but most times they clench.

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There are flowers in my periphery, when I roll my eyes far back enough. They're mottled.