

First Place

the heat and wetness are making me see things. everyday when i walk by the isetan department store and through the construction walkway keeping the overhead train construction debris from hitting pedestrians (me) i have visions of my father. he is on the edge of my mind. if i close my eyes and reach past my eyelids i can almost see him. but i'm walking along a busy bangkok street and at nineteen, i don't have the balance to walk with my closed. so i imagine him instead. he is wearing gold lame hot pants and one of the fake skin-tight armani t-shirts which are sold by every other street vendor. the t-shirt is black with gold lettering. he's lost the weight he put on after he turned fifty. his whole body shape is different, but i dismiss this change as a minor one. he's in my head, he can be whoever i want him to be.

i'm crossing the street and walking into lumphini park, the quietest place inside the city and the only place where there is a crosswalk light which works. my father is with his friend george. george is an ex-priest, twice. george is wearing black leather pants. his body is also trim, much more visibly contoured than i remember. his dknv t-shirt is white with red lettering. he is the femme in this relationship.

the one thing which bothers me, seeing them together, is that they are walking around clutching each others' asses. this is not appropriate behavior in thailand. passengers on the bus are careful to not touch one another. even when the bus is packed full of people. they are so visible as *farangs*, as foreigners. their grasp of one another is so easy, so sure.

i walk right by them. i stare at both of them but neither of them recognize me. i have not seen my father for five years. i have not seen george for six-and-a-half years. but

(My) Sensual Geography

by tyrell haberkorn

my father and i have the same eyes. hazel with green flecks. our noses are the same shape, definitely not-turned-up.

he wears a mets cap, to shield his very bald by now (i can only imagine) head from the sun. the cap is incongruous with the rest of his outfit. i like incongruity. i wonder if his hair is still silver underneath or if it has turned white. i sit down in the park, pull out the last letter i got from my mother and realize my father is an illusion. he is not a gay man. he left my mother and me five years and six days ago. he is not grabbing an ex-priest's ass on a busy street.

it is me who wants to be touched. it is very damp and if anyone touched me their fingers would stick to my body. it is me who longs to be bumped into on the street, on the bus, in shops. it is me who wants to touch.

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Flipping the TV channel button to 26, PBS, one of the two channels we actually get on our near-death television, I yell, "Hey Louise, are you going to watch this documentary with me? It's about gay men in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. It's on PBS." Louise doesn't like watching network television, just like she won't

eat sugar. I buy fairly-traded coffee but put sugar in it, which she sees as self-defeating.

PBS has been doing this series all spring about gay men and lesbians around the world; the programs have been of various quality in places where English isn't spoken, it sometimes seems like there are things the translators are not saying. Or maybe something is lost in the translation.

She walks into the room and stops next to the edge of the futon-sofa where I'm sitting. Her hand rests briefly on my shoulder. I find that so erotic. I spent one summer so starved for touch, any touch. I imagined that I could save the random bumps and shoves I received standing on the bus and walking on the street and could trade them in for a hug, or a night of sleeping in someone's soft, flannel-covered arms. Her soft, flannel-covered arms.

"No. I think I'm going to run to the grocery store for some mangos." She removes her hand.

"Mangos aren't in season in March. Especially in Chicago," I say.

"Yeah, I know. But the bodega on 63rd Street always has them. Even in March. I want to make mango milkshakes."

"Okay. Whatever. Would you take the recycling down? There's not any more space in our container." I love that Louise is buying mangos. I can't eat sugar because workers aren't paid enough to harvest and process it, but she can buy off-season fruit? She doesn't forbid me to eat

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