



Writing | Symposium 2021

First, we drew

By Angie Lee

You approached me on the first day of first grade wearing that one teal puffer jacket—why were you wearing it in August, in a school that lacked air conditioning? You said, years later, that it was my desk that drew you to me in that classroom, where I put my backpack on a hook and housed my purple lunchbox in a cubby, though it would've been easier for everyone if I'd kept them hanging from the handy black handles on the back of my wheelchair. My desk was plain and grey, but it was bigger than the others', and it was decorated with blue organizers for colored folders married to matching spiral notebooks, and the gel pens, oh, it was a gel pen heaven. *How come you get a cooler desk than me?* you wondered. So I fit. I fit under that desk, my wheels and my knees, just like you fit in with the crowd, with the boys, with my definition of a best friend. You wondered, but you didn't ask—more urgent was the need to try out my spectacular pens, so together we drew before class began. You drew a little brown dog with a red and green scarf, and it made me think: maybe my dog needs a scarf, too.



My Mother's Shoes

By Angie Lee

While I'm away, they block the path into my home.
Their black and white argyle has turned grey from wear
to match the charcoal ramp they guard like a gnome,
an impossible hurdle between the foyer and my wheelchair.
Places my mother's shoes linger when I'm a ways
away: pedals of pianos, students' carpeted floors, tiles
of the Korean grocery store on which she sashays,
rolling a cart of pears and rice wine through the aisles.
Since I'm away, there's no need to keep the ramp space clear,
no burden, however small, to move them in case they interfere.
Now, upon my return, they impede my entrance, if only
for the instant it takes her foot to kick. (Still, that instant is heavy.)
They land on the dusty garage floor like dead weights,
unthanked, and she holds the door open and waits.



Hal-abeoji

By Angie Lee

When you were diagnosed, I was more upset because
my mom flew across the world to be with you,
leaving me
where my dad had to do my hair. He's not good at it.

My mom flew across the world to be with you
at your funeral (I remembered),
where my dad had to do my hair. He's not good at it.
Only once I was holding a wooden cube of your ashes

at your funeral I remembered
how you'd point out curb cuts where my wheelchair could go, and
only once I was holding a wooden cube of your ashes
did I thank you for raising my mother.

How you'd point out curb cuts where my wheelchair could go, and
give me your woolen hat even though I said, "I'm not cold."
Did I thank you for raising my mother?
Let me have it, please.

Give me your woolen hat, even though I said I'm not cold.
It seems funny, but
let me have it, please.
Yes, you were the type to smuggle me ice *kae-ki* before dinner.

"It seems funny but
let's keep this between you and me."
Yes, you were the type to smuggle me ice *kae-ki* before dinner;
I felt closer to you when I found out you were.

Let's keep this between you and me.
When you were diagnosed, I was more upset because
I felt closer to you when I found out you were
leaving me.



Quarantine Orders: A History

By Angie Lee

They say it's not safe to go outside,
so instead I order—from an e-commerce giant
that recently attended a Congress interrogation
about its market power, virtually, a meeting
at which even the CEO forgot to unmute
himself—things to my doorstep:

matcha green tea powder
non-stick square cake baking pan, nine inches
The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois
coppertone tanning lotion, eight fluid ounces
colorful straws, pack of 500
Dog Songs: Poems by Mary Oliver
more matcha green tea powder
six paper mache boxes (ideal for crafting & storage)
plant mister spray bottle, pack of two
Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli
a betta fish, later named G-Dragon
Omega One buffet pellets, 1.5 millimeters
Becoming by Michelle Obama
leaf pad for fish, pack of two
Uncanny Valley: A Memoir by Anna Wiener
resin rock mountain, aquarium decoration
technic app-controlled racing lego car
fish tank gravel cleaner
Elmer's sticky tack (reusable)
foldable haircut cape
jute rope, eight millimeters

essentially unessential items—
which arrive in paper packages
that I let sit for 24 hours to rid the virus
before piercing and tearing them open
—attempts, luxurious and brittle,
to usher life from out to in.

Medicine & the Muse

Angie Lee is a senior at Stanford majoring in English and minoring in Human Biology. Her creative writing often explores her interdisciplinary interests in medicine and the humanities. In her free time, Angie likes to sing a cappella, eat spicy tuna rolls, and blog about how disabled people are, in fact, fully able.