



Sam Cha

*Unbearable Splendor:*  
Against "Hybrid" Genre; Against Genre

---

1.

*Unbearable Splendor* (Coffee House Press 2016) is a book that I love. Because I love it, it's hard to write about. Any love is hard to write, as the Elizabethans knew very well with their icy-hots and their lively deaths, because love is or exists in a tension or flux between knowledge (that which can be conveyed in words) and mystery (that which cannot be conveyed in words); between speech and silence; between that which falls, failing, into sense, and that towards which all senses only dimly point. (Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is a kind of lover's discourse, perhaps more so than Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*.) And that difficulty's multiplied when you're writing about writing that you love. Because writing itself is always in tension between what can and can't be said, what can and can't be known. Writing itself is a kind of love, and so writing about love always undermines itself.

Nevertheless:

*Unbearable Splendor* is a small red-covered book. From beginning to acknowledgements page it is 119 pages long. On the red cover there is/are:

- a) the outline of a labyrinth, drawn in white;
- b) nine circles, printed on the cover so that they appear to go over and under the lines of the labyrinth. They're arranged so that it looks like you'd hooked a finger into the center of a set of nine concentric rings and dragged them up, so that part of the top edge of the smallest circle now barely protrudes above the top edge of the largest, forming a shape that suggests a

truncated cone: a topographic map of Dante's nine-circled hell, or perhaps of the Tower of Babel. Or, alternately, it could be a schematic of Dante's nine-spheres of heaven;

- c) on either side of the top edge of the smallest circle, two collections of arcs that look like horns, which, when coupled with the outline of the labyrinth, transforms the nine circles into the head of the Minotaur;
- d) the title of the book, printed inside the smallest circle, or infernal tier, or floor of Babel, or heavenly sphere, taking the place of, variously, Satan, the white rose of the heavenly choir, the zenith of human ambition, the impact crater of the wrath of god, the face of the Minotaur;
- e) the author's name, printed at the bottom of the cover, near the entrance / exit of the labyrinth.

"Sun Yung Shin" is how her name's written there. But on Facebook, recently, she's changed the spelling of her name (in accordance with the Revised Romanization system, which was approved by the Korean Ministry of Culture in 2000) to "Seonyeong Shin."

This doubling of the author's name is coincidental but emblematic, because *Unbearable Splendor* is a book that's obsessed with dualities, with doublings, with doppelgängers, with layered, palimpsestic

contradictions.<sup>1</sup> It opens with one. A black hole, despite the name, is “anything but empty space,” says one of the epigraphs to the first piece in the book, “Valley, Uncanny.” What seems to be an absence is in fact a surfeit of presence. “Valley, Uncanny” is itself double or uncanny, fitting neither here nor there, following, as it does, the dreamlike logic of a poem, with all of a poem’s obliqueness, ambiguities, redactions, silences

---

<sup>1</sup> I have also had more than one name, have been my own doppelgänger.

When I was thirteen, I spent a year in school Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was an awful time for me. I felt like I couldn’t speak.

I’d been living in Seoul since third grade, but that wasn’t the problem. I was bilingual because I’d spent five and a half years in Wisconsin as a small child, and because I read a lot of books in English and wore out the spine on my Penguin Classics paperback of *Don Quixote* and wore out the spine on my Signet Classics paperback of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* with the silhouette of Jeremy Brett on the cover, and had at the time a memory for text that was, if not precisely eidetic, was close enough as made no difference, and because I watched a lot of *Macgyver* on AFKN (the Armed Forces Korea Network, for America soldiers stationed in Korea), and hummed the theme song to myself whenever I was trying to solve a problem.

So the structure of the language, the shape of the sounds, the vagaries of English orthography (cacography?)—none of this was an issue. The issue was me, my body, the way I carried myself, the way I’d been trained to carry myself.

For example, when a teacher calls on you in class, in Seoul circa 1987-1991, you’re supposed to stand up to speak. To do otherwise invites punishment from the teacher; punishment that, depending on the teacher, can range from verbal harassment to verbal abuse to stress positions to chalk whipped at your head to slaps to rulers to bamboo switches to poolcues to hockey sticks.

So when Mr. Burke, one of the two eighth-grade teachers at Peabody Elementary, big and round and ruddy and crew-cut and all of thirty years old, called on me to introduce myself on my first day of school, I, small and plump and wearing a horizontal striped polo shirt from the Gap in the year of the Guns ‘n Roses T-Shirt and straight-cut Levis in the year of the Kriss-Kross Sag and blue Adidas Torsion in the year of the Reebok Pump, I jumped up out of my chair with an alacrity born of years of training, the motion smooth and perfect and without a shadow of hesitation, like a punch that a kung-fu master has practiced tens of thousands of times, I stood with my chin up, back straight, ass clenched, shoulders open, heels touching each other, feet planted at a thirty degree angle, fists half-closed and resting on the seams of my pants, and said *Hello! My name is Cha Seung! I’m from Korea! Cha is my last name, not my first! Seung is hard to pronounce, so I’d like to go by Sam!*

A moment of silence.

Why is he standing up, I heard a girl whisper to another girl.

How about, said a sandy-haired sociopath with pustules of acne glittering like carbuncles in his face, we call you Ralph? He stuck a finger down his throat and gagged.

And everybody laughed.

Including Mr. Burke, who, since he was all of thirty in 1991 or 1992, may still be teaching Social Studies somewhere, although I would like to think that he eventually found an occupation for which he was more suited. Like being a birthday clown. Or the tail-less donkey at the birthday party. Or the piñata.

That was the first time I was Sam. Or, if you prefer, the first time I was me. There were a pair of us, then. How dreary to be somebody, to be somebodies, I want to say, which adds Emily for a third, and as soon as I have said that here’s Walt because the somebodies crowd and cluster and I have said I have said which invites Virginia in and here’s Johnny and here’s Jack Nicholson peering through the shattered door in the haunted house; I am multitudes, legions: you’ve taught me your tongue and my profit on it’s that I know how to quote.

—but moving visually like an essay, with long lines, paragraphs, graphs showing the curve of the uncanny valley, as plotted on the y-axis of familiarity and the x-axis of human likeness. “I was a hole,” says the speaker of the piece, with the verbal echo of “whole” hiding, *unheimlich*, just behind the “hole”; the hole making the whole hollow. “I brought it, myself,” she says, immediately breaking the whole/hole and herself into two, to “미국 *mi guk* ‘beautiful country,’ America, the United States”—a list of names for the US that gives the lie to the easy unity of “United.” Later on in the piece the speaker’s two-year-old self and her adult self meet. Later still the speaker reflects on her “performance of childhood,” as a two-year-old Korean child adopted by American parents; in her memory she becomes a “robot, / a creature of industry / a tool with a perfect face and perfect thoughts,” like a reverse Galatea, becoming effigy; becoming, in order to be accepted as human, *inhuman*. In “The Other Asterion, or, The Minotaur’s Sacrifice,” a short story that is a riff on a story by Borges, the narrator, who guards the Minotaur Asterion in his labyrinth, gradually *becomes* the Minotaur, and the Minotaur/narrator, who has been disposing of the human sacrifices offered to him every nine years, submits humbly to Theseus’s sword. “Orphan: The Plural Form,” a meditation on the etymologies of the words “orphan” and “adoptee,” segues into fractured lyrics that address, or speak for, Antigone, which in turn segues into “The Limit Case,” an essay about Antigone as cyborg, a la Donna Haraway, “a machine pretending to be a disobedient girl [...] excessive [...] eternal [...] hybrid of life and death.” Faced with the unknowability of the past, not knowing their date of birth or the name of their birth parents, the “we” of “Exactly Like You,” a long prose-poem slash memoir slash found-poetry piece, invents possible origins for themselves: “perhaps our father and mother were people from the north [...] perhaps [...]we were the fourth child, one too many [...] perhaps our mother was raped by a taxi driver [...] perhaps our parents were involved in an extramartial affair [...] perhaps our father died.” Caught in the labyrinth of radical doubt, the speaker(s) respond(s), not with a *cogito*, but with a *cogitamus*: the “I” splintering into many, who coalesce or coagulate, Minotaur-like, into a many-natured, many-historied “we.” “We are a copy and an original,” they say: “nameless, and renamed.”

An early attempt at this essay, in which I was trying to explain why *Unbearable Splendor* moves between poem and essay, between the lyric and the discursive, began with:

*Poetry is about saying what cannot be said.*

*Since nothing can be said, this means that poetry is about saying nothing.*

*The end.*

I still think that's true.<sup>2</sup>

The lyric is about being a dying thing, about being something, a thinking feeling human mind, that is always just about to become nothing.

The lyric is about being.

---

<sup>2</sup> But perhaps it requires a bit of clarification.

What I mean when I say that poetry is about saying what can't be said:

Poetry is about saying things. But because of that, poetry is the art of leaving things out. It leaves things out because not all things that we can be aware of are commensurate with language; i.e., not all things that we can wish to say can be said through language. Human language is confined to that subset of things that are human that can be spoken.

Things that can't be said are hard to think about. And they are hard to remember. Because they are hard to think about and hard to remember, they are hard to think of as part of us, as part of what constitutes the person here and now being alive and aware.

And they are almost impossible to communicate to other people.

Because they are hard to think about and hard to remember and almost impossible to communicate, we tend to shove them off to the side. We forget that they are human things.

We confuse them with the language of the world. The long slow sentences spoken by sunlight and gravity and heat, which comprise everything that is not human.

(But of course they also comprise that which is: we are not distinct from geological processes, the life and death of stars, the turning of galactic arms. We forget that.)

Poetry is an art that returns to us these nameless and silent things, these forgotten things, these almost incommunicable things, these almost inhuman things. Such as: love (not the concept, which we do have a name for, but the shape of, the sum of, all of the individual moments and awareness of those moments that comprise the experience of love, which is an infinity of names and names for that infinity of names) or the thingness of things or the true nature of time (i.e. that it does not exist).

When poetry does this properly, we feel it as an intrusion into our awareness of everything about the world that is not human, everything that transcends or underlies or subtends or parallels or diverges from the human, everything that we cannot bear or dare—what we used to (or still do) call, variously or simultaneously the divine, the infernal, the otherworld, the world-which-is-not-ours. Which is perhaps what the Neo-Platonists mean by *pneuma*, the breath of the world, which is spirit, the spirit that blows into every holt and heath the tender crop, in-spiring, inspir-ed, in-spirit, what you give back when you ex-spir, expire, the soul the ghost you give up, surrender, as Teresa of Avila surrendered, as the burning arrow jutting in the angel's hand entered, the red wet plush of, the hot thrum of, her heart.

Poetry is about everything about the world that is not human, that we can't experience directly, or, having experienced, will never be able to communicate. Which is to say: death. Which (since death is the limit of what we are, and since we are defined by our limits) is say: being.

---

And being is precisely what can't be said.<sup>3</sup>

An essay, by way of contrast, is about trying to say something, about trying to make something happen. An essay *essays*, tries. To do.

If a poem is about trying to be something, while an essay is about trying to do something, and if you accept that this is a real difference, then a poem's about being, about being-defined-by-death, while an essay's about struggle, about trying to live. This contradiction—in impulse, in thrust—makes any combination of the two—any child, any “hybrid”—monstrous, like Shin's *Antigone*, a “hybrid of life and death.”

If *Unbearable Splendor* is about becoming monstrous—about what it feels like to be a monster, about what it feels like to be torn and doubled and doubled up inside—which is a one way to think about being an immigrant, about having (at least) two heritages, two lines of descent, and if it's talking about this in a form that is itself monstrous, doubled, hybrid, then the obvious thing to say is that it's deploying this monstrous combination as a figure for the immigrant experience, or for Seonyeong / Sun Yung Shin's specific immigrant experience. A torn form for the torn identity.<sup>4</sup>

But some of the pain is also the pain of being torn between genres, torn by the idea of genre, what Derrida calls the “law” of genre: “as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity.”

And: “the law is mad.”

To write an essay that is also a poem is, in this framework, to create a monster, our own little Frankensteined patchwork, strange hybrid of life and death,

---

<sup>3</sup> “In every story I tell comes / a point where I can see no further. / I hate that point. It is why they / call storytellers blind—a taunt,” as Anne Carson says, in “Short Talk on Homo Sapiens.”

<sup>4</sup> When Orpheus was torn to pieces, they say, the head of Orpheus floated down the river, singing. But whether the song from the torn mouth was also torn, they don't say. Not in the fragments of the story that we have.

Shambling rot-seamed hulk always  
one mouth singing  
one mouth fumbling for a lost word  
(what an American mouth)

lurching in opposite directions  
while the other calls it liar  
the other drawing *we speak English here*  
(what a truly American thing to say)

a genre of trouble, of troubledness. Mad.

2.

Like this thing I'm writing right now, the thing that you're reading, which started out as an attempt to talk about *Unbearable Splendor* and is now spinning off into something else, something I can't quite see. Torn into sections. Diction and vocabulary veering back and forth.

This is an essay, supposedly. That's the genre I'm working in/with, or simply working, the way one works metal or a seam of metal in a mine.

But as soon as I say that I'm filled with anxiety. You could say that I find the whole thing trying. How does genre even work, is what I want to know. And what, as a writer, do I get out of the whole

thing? (Alternately: *how* do I get out of the whole thing?) Is there a genre that's not troubled?<sup>5</sup> Is genre a material? A repository of material? A neighborhood? A climate? A prescription? An algorithm? A law? A set of commandments? A process? A formula? A nation? A family?

The best essay in the English language, by my lights, is a chapter in a novel. The chapter is "The Whiteness of the Whale." The novel is *Moby Dick*. The second best essay is a poem by Anne Carson called "The Glass Essay." Other essays that I love are also poems: "One Poem," by Layli Long Soldier, and "The Colonel" by Carolyn Forché, and "I Hoisted Them, Two Drug Dealers, I Guess That's What They Were," by Diane Seuss, and *Eye of the Needle*, by Fanny Howe. "On the Puppet Theatre," by Heinrich Von Kleist, is an essay, arguably, but there's nothing in it that's not fiction. Derrida's much more enjoyable to read when you read him as poetry. So's Heidegger. (Neither of them are very good poets, though.) In 2015, right after Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* was nominated for the National Book Award in poetry, you still couldn't find it on the poetry bookshelf in the Harvard Bookstore. Instead, it was shelved with books of essays.

---

<sup>5</sup> Every definition of genre creates a blind spot.

(—if for instance we were to imagine genres as planets; if we were to consider, however unlikely or incongruous the thought, the attention of the prevailing culture as a light source, a Mordor-Eye, a kind of hooded and blinkered star that, like a lighthouse or flashlight sends light in only one particular direction; if we may imagine critics as intricate mechanisms of lens and prism and mirror and amplifier that serve to concentrate and intensify and focus the light of the culture into a kind of analytic laser; then we may imagine the planet Poetry swimming into the beam of any critic, Blahrold Hoom, let's call them, strictly for euphony, and a face of Poetry lighting up, the mountains on the terminator in sharp relief, various colors visible only in the wavelengths of Hoom-light fluorescing, Hoom-light loving species thawing and waking up to their cyclical routines of anxiety and agon—and other colors flattened; delicate frost structures melting in Hoom-heat; and the other side of Poetry thrown into dark; the shadow cast by Poetry in the Hoom-light extending out into space like a long hourglassed phlange of black, endlessly, until it intersects the orbit of some other genre-planet, so that, for instance, on the planet of Journalism, Poetry may seem to be entirely in eclipse and the inhabitants of Journalism write article after article on the death of Art, the silence of the iambs—)

Since all genres are related, and equally unreal, every definition of any genre creates shadows that partially overlap with, or land smack-dab in, the heart of the domain of another genre, so that perhaps the capitol of Prose will be situated in a terra incognita of the map of the empire of Poems, and vice versa, until all of literature is a Ukraine or a Macedonia or an Afghanistan or an America of competing histories and boundaries and legal canons. Which is when a certain kind of reader will start building walls and issuing or denying visas and marking passports with jackboots or rubber stamps or RFID.

---

Sometimes I think that the idea of genre is mostly a guide for consumption. Consumption as purchase and use and reception, yes, but also consumption as *ingestion*. How to buy and how to read = how to cook; how to eat.

Consider: when *Moby Dick* was first published, critics didn't know what to do with it. The book didn't seem to fit into any of their categories. Was it a sober-minded novel? A romance, full of wild circumstance and supernatural intervention? Magazine articles with a frame-narrative? Was it a stirring tale of the high seas? A singularly bloody-minded repository of whaling best practices? Was it meant to be funny? Sacriligious? Was it fiction? Was it fact? The reviewer for the London *Britannia* could only define it by what it wasn't: "it is certainly neither a novel nor a romance," they wrote. But then what was it? The reviewer for the London *Athenaeum* was offended by *Moby Dick*'s multifariousness, its polymorphousness, its promiscuity: "this is an ill-compounded mixture of romance and matter-of-fact," they wrote. (The book as bad drug, as a contaminated potion-poison; *pharmakon*.) Unlike the reviewer for the *Britannia*, however, the *Athenaeum* reviewer was able to place *Moby Dick* in a genre. Not a book-genre, though—a food-genre. *Moby Dick* was a salad. But not a good one (if indeed such a thing as a good salad existed for the reviewer). It was indicative of "bad tastes," this "salad" of "ravings and scraps of useful knowledge flung together." They didn't like the recipe; it tasted bad; they wanted to send the salad back. No compliments to the chef.

To be a salad in 1851 was to be invisible, unnamed. It was to be left off the menu. The heyday of salmagundi was long gone; the periodical named after that dish long shuttered. Lucien Olivier was ten years away from compounding his mixture of grouse, veal tongue, caviar, smoked duck, lettuce, crayfish tails, capers, and aioli—a salad that so captured the imaginations of rich Muscovites that its pale and Hellman-ed descendants, with their bologna and dill pickles, their hard-boiled eggs and cubed potatoes, are still be found on Russophone menus around the world. Auguste Escoffier was 4 years old; Waldorf-Astor was 3. The fathers of Caesar Cardini and Robert Cobb were zygotes. The New York Public Library's website has a wonderful archive of menus from hotels and restaurants. A typical menu from a relatively

tony, high-falutin' establishment (the City Hotel, in Hartford) in 1851, the year *Moby Dick* was published, lists:

Mock Turtle Soup \* Boiled Mutton Chops \* Boiled Corn Beef \* Boiled Chickens  
 Boiled Pork \* Boiled Ham \* Mutton Chops \* Cold Roast Pork \* Cold Roast Beef  
 Cold Tongue Sliced \* Calves Feet Brown Butter \* Boiled Rice \* Boiled Hominy  
 Roast Beef \* Roast Turkey \* Roast Gosling \* Roast Chickens \* Pandowdy Pudding  
 Cream Sauce \* Apple Pie \* Mince Pie \* Cream Puffs \* Cake Flummery \* Apples

No salad. They existed, of course—John Evelyn, who was a friend of Samuel Pepys, wrote a whole book (*Acetaria: A Discourse of Sallets*) about salads that included not only recipes but also instructions for growing the ingredients from seed, and for designing gardens in order to maximise yield and flavor. (What is the genre of *Acetaria*?) But a Sweetgreen, in the 1850s, would have gone bankrupt in a matter of days.

Genre as guide to consumption invites this kind of exclusion, this kind of invisibility. If you're not recognizable, you're inedible.

3.

What if we were to imagine beyond the law of genre, the consumptive insulator of genre, the boiled-beef-and-flummery of genre, the border patrol of genre, the ICE, the iceberg, the sad salad iceberg wedge of genre?

If writing and love always exist in tension, in a Heraclitean flux between opposite poles, then writing and love are uncanny things. They are never at rest. Every country's new, foreign, especially the ones that they call home. When we write, when we love, we are immigrants; we are migrating, we are caravans.

---

Immigrants and exiles are the perfect writers because we are at home in this state of not being at home; because we know this unknowing, because we have learned to unlearn, because we carry within us multiple versions of ourselves, multiple histories, whole nations, continents, oceans. We know the art of losing. (Elizabeth Bishop was an immigrant, too, in Brazil.) To be an immigrant is to learn to die many times, to be forced to, out of sheer hunger, to pick and choose the languages, the styles, the genres, to fall into, to fall with. It is to be made of contradictions; it is to revel in them. It is to make a carnival of your losses. Your presidents and pundits will natter on about winning, but what's so great about winning? Winning's for losers, for aging bone-spur bully boys thumping their upholstered chests. Losing's the essential human art.

And so I hate "hybrid." I hate genre. I am not your mule. I will not swallow your condom-wrapped assumptions about what writing is; I will not smuggle them for you.

So-called "hybrid" writing is an immigrant mode, an exile's mode. We write it for survival. Joyce was an immigrant and Nabokov and Stein. Su Dongpo, who was writing lyrical essays with rhymed prose and fragments of verse a thousand years ago in Song Dynasty China, was an exile in his own country. So was Usama Ibn Munqidh, who mentored Saladin in poetry and war, and wrote whole books that were combinations of memoir and anthology and annotated bibliography. So, for that matter, was Melville, wandering the terraqueous globe in his youth, exiled from the world of literature in his middle years, his writing desk gathering dust. Don't even come at me with your Deleuze and Guattari and their hypothetical nomads, their criss-cross de- and re-territorializations like Salvador Dali tic-tac-toe. They were playing catch-up. They were playing. And a piffle for your flâneury. We have been *roaming throughout the earth going back and forth*, as it says in your scriptures, long before your Baudelaires made it fashionable or merely theoretical. (Satan was the original immigrant, the original flâneur.) There were travellers from foreign lands wandering lonely as clouds adrift and aloof and alienated through the streets and crowds of Ur and Uruk when Gilgamesh was flesh.

Some years ago a friend of mine, Lithuanian/Russian by way of Brooklyn, introduced me to a dish that she knew as “Korean carrot salad”; they’re very popular in Russia, she said. It was a little tub of shredded carrots she’d gotten from the Russian grocery. When I tasted them they were familiar but strange: sweet and salty and oiled and onioned the way I’d cook them to put into *japchae*, but with olive oil rather than sesame, and paprika and coriander and lemon instead of garlic and ginger and scallions and soy. Later I read that ethnic Koreans, during the Second World War, were forced to move from Manchuria into the desolate marches of the Kazakh and Uzbek SSRs, for fear that they would spy for the Japanese. An estimated 40,000 died of exposure and starvation. The ones who survived wanted to make kimchi, but they didn’t have the right ingredients, and so they roamed the unfamiliar hills and meadows, they roamed the marketplaces where nobody spoke a word they could understand, the pitiless and arid towns and they *picked*, they *sampled*, they *foraged*, they *bricolaged*. For a taste that might, every now and then, remind them of their lost home. In my barren twenties, yearning for a taste of *naengmyun*, for thin buckwheat noodles with chilled beef broth and pickles and spicy marinated skate and hot chili paste, lost in Williamstown or Charlottesville or New Brunswick far from any Korean grocery, I hoarded Tabasco and Frank’s Red Hot and Taco Bell Fire Sauce and Sriracha to put on Japanese *soba* with Romaine lettuce and a hard-boiled egg.

The *japchae* that the “Korean” carrots remind me of is simply the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese 雜菜, or “mixed vegetables”: *chop suey*, here in the US, where Chinese immigrants mixed and matched local ingredients with a recipe from home. (A kind of salad, then.) “American Chop Suey” is a dish made with tomato sauce, ground beef, mushrooms, cheese, and macaroni. A macaronic language is a language that uses a mixture of languages; Dog-Latin, for instance, uses vernacular words mixed with Latin words, and Latin grammar; Wikipedia says the term derives from *maccarone*, or dumpling. Dumplings and pasta were transmitted, from their point of origin in China, to Europe, by nomadic traders and exiles. 18th century British “Macaroni” were wealthy youths who had passed through Italy on the Grand Tour and affected a taste for pasta and Continental fashion and highfalutin’ Continental language; your Yankee

---

Doodle, when he sticks a feather in his hat, is aping those British dandies aping Italian customs and food culture that comes all the way from China; he's a macaroni of a macaroni of a macaroni of a *jiaozi*, a *mantou*, a *bao*; and all our languages, ultimately, are thus macaronic, are immigrant things.

Most people enter the world of language once, as a child. That has always seemed to me to be the true fall from Eden. You go from being part of the world—from not knowing the difference between you and the world or any of the parts of the world—to having a name, to having to learn names, having to know difference, having to learn to be a self, having to learn to be lonely. Having to learn to die. When my children were four or so (they're twins), we were coming back from the bus stop. We walked through the pedestrian walkway under the big concrete apartment building. It's windy there; we used to pretend that that was the home of the wind, that we needed to be as quiet as we possibly could so that the wind wouldn't wake up grumpy. Tiptoe through the tunnel holding our breath, and then run from the far end laughing. This time though. This time my daughter tugged on my hand, face angled down, and asked, in a strange squeezed-up voice: *Dad? Does anybody survive?*

She meant: is death avoidable; does anybody survive living.

I was two people then, too. One of them wanted to say *yes*. The other one told the truth.

Both of them went home with their children, their crying daughter, their crestfallen son; their people. Their *gens*.

And made them macaroni. And *japchae*. A mess of dumplings, with ketchup.