

Red

I.

In my culture, red is a powerful color. It is the color of joy, luck, and happiness. It wards off evil, drapes over the shoulders of brides. On Chinese New Year, red envelops my body as I kneel to the ground and *ketou* to my grandparents—a deep show of respect and gratitude to elders, as we send them off on another year of health and fortune. My braids tickle the hardwood floor, and there is dust on my red pants when I stand up, but I would brush it away and happily run off with my red envelopes. I love the color red.

II.

The air feels cold as I walk into the white room that smells like plastic and permanent marker. I grasp my mother's big, warm hands as a tall woman approaches and says something. I can't understand the words she's saying.

And my mother leaves. I look around. Everything is white—the walls, the adults speaking in a language I can't understand, the other children playing on the floor. There's a large rug with squares of different colors—yellow, blue, green, purple. Red. I quietly walk over to a red square and sit down. No one asks me to play with them.

IV.

Everyone's favorite color is pink or blue. They go to each other's houses and paint each other's nails and talk about boys. I am not invited. My favorite color is red.

III.

My teacher isn't saying my name. Every year I have memorized what to say when teaching my teachers how to pronounce my name, because they always pause before they get to me on the attendance sheet. "Yi-Ann," I say. "Like Lee Ann, but with a Y." But this teacher does not even try. I am reduced to "her." "She." At worst, a finger vaguely pointed at me.

After a while, I stop talking in class. And I wish more than anything that my name is Emily or Sara or Hannah or Ashley—a name that teachers would be willing to say. I tell my mother to stop packing me dumplings for lunch, because it feels just like my name. Too red. I feel like an exam grade when people look at me—calculating what percent I am cool, what percent I am Asian. Most of the time, I don't think I pass.

When people ask my favorite color, I lie and say blue.

IV.

It is Chinese New Year, and it is time to *ketou* to my grandparents. As I kneel, I feel an incredible sense of shame wash over me. I feel stupid for kneeling—why do we have to kneel anyway? I feel guilty for feeling stupid. I feel angry for feeling guilty.

That night, I stare at the red envelope on my desk. My eyes burn with tears. I love red. *I hate red.*

They stole my red from me.