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Forever Foreign

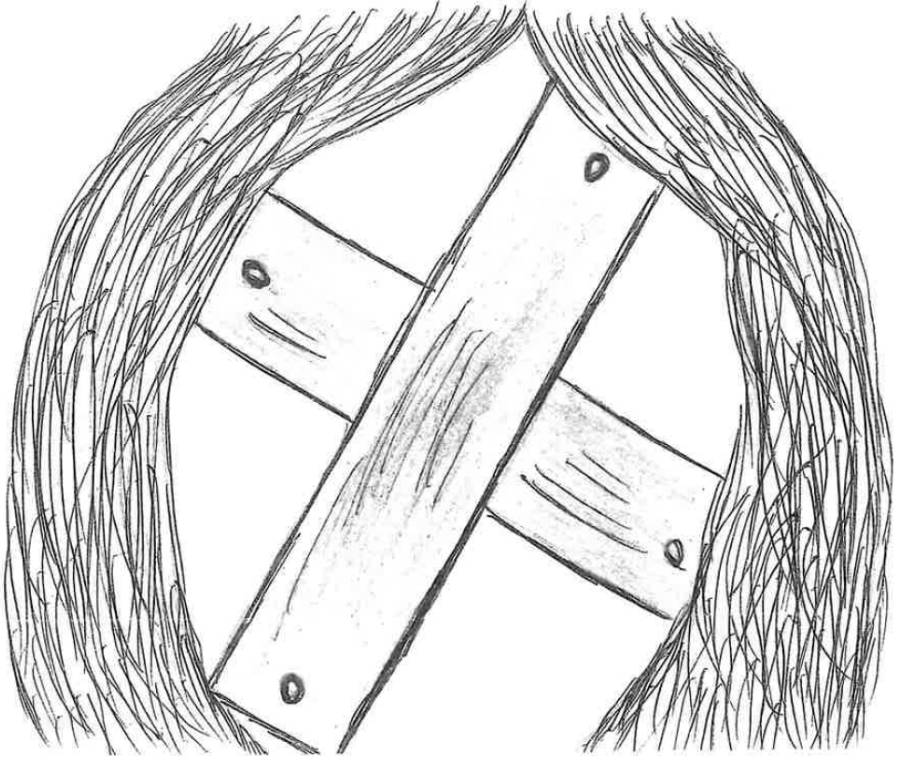
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FOREVER FOREIGN

MARYANA KAYUMOVA

When people praise my resilience,
I wonder if they realize that resilience
Doesn't erase all the painful moments I lived through.
Each undesired encounter,
Each wrong word and the meaning behind it,
Each time the rules everyone else gets to play by no longer apply to me.
I wish I had a cure for these feelings,
These feelings I feel...
When I sit alone in a high school cafeteria while everyone stares, whispers, and giggles.
When some boy in my PE class tells me he heard all Russian women are prostitutes.
When people say they thought I was Chinese,
but what I sense they really want to say is that they
thought I was one of those dirty, chinky-eyed people who eat dogs.
When some white lady describes me as that Oriental girl with an unproportioned body.
When I overhear a group of black girls say that all Asians look the same.
When my Korean boyfriend tells me his Korean friends do not like me.
When I'm told to lower my already low voice because my Russian accent sounds threatening.
When people label me as my skin color, as my facial features, as my national origin, as my
ancestry, as anything that can be used to protest my presence.
When people say my intelligence is the product of my Asianness.
When my classmate refers to immigrants as aliens.
When the manager who is Asian tells me they are out of job applications.
When my client asks me if all Russians are communists.
When my coworkers suggest I would be better at polishing nails.
When people ask me if there is an easier version of my name.
When I hear someone say my daughter looks like a little white girl.
When people ask me what Russian food tastes like.
When some white guy gets on a D train, sits next to me, and asks me if I'm comfortable.
When these different faces (black, brown, Asian, and Jewish) silently watch me as
this guy calls me derogatory names and tells me to go back to my country.
These feelings I feel when wrong words enter my day like cluster bombs,
leaving their intentions forever inside me.
These feelings I feel when I read Zora Neale Hurston's
"I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background."
I feel all these feelings because I feel most foreign when I'm thrown against any background.

Art by Maryana Kayumova.