

# Intertext

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## Pride

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# PRIDE

ANNIE SHI

the first time you ask about it,  
your eyes are still bright—  
in mama's bed while she braids your hair  
she goes a little red and pulls real hard  
and says "don't be stupid,"  
"you don't know what you're talking about."

later, you wake up to shouting  
and watch her sweep up the shattered glass  
from the kitchen floor and you think,  
*is that all there is?*

you wonder about it in primary school,  
when you're holding hands with your classmate,  
her pigtails swinging in the dusty summer wind  
while you split the orange in your lunchbox  
and when you put your lips to the back of her hand,  
like they do on TV,  
the world is a little brighter afterwards.

later, you're sitting in the principal's office  
and after the caning they tell you that  
you can never kiss another girl and you think,  
*is that all there is?*

you pick the roses at midnight  
from your back garden,  
only the yellow ones—it's her favorite color  
and in the darkness of the Macbeth play you sneak her kisses  
and again, amidst the cheer of team rallies  
and in the locker room after gym  
and this is high school and this is america and you finally feel  
free,  
until her parents find out;  
one morning she is in your arms  
and the next she's gone,  
and you don't hear from her again.

later, baba asks you why you're still crying,  
because he doesn't know—can never know  
*friends come and go in life*, he says and you think  
*is that all there is?*

during your last summer before college,  
the rolling California hills are a beautiful emerald green.  
your throat is tight and your lips are hot  
when you ask for the second time,  
tentative with what you know now,  
and baba swerves into the side of the highway,  
his grip taut on the steering wheel  
"unnatural" kinda hurts but "disgusting" strikes the deepest  
you will never ask again.

later, you hear that your sister-in-law  
can never bear the grandchildren that  
mama so dearly wants to hold  
and the weight of the world, as always,  
falls to you,  
and you think  
*is that all there is?*

Shi: Pride



you pick out birth control like  
fruit,  
swallow the blue pills like  
candy,  
and try to feel  
something with him  
when "no" means  
nothing,  
even when it's sorrow,  
even when it's pain.

later, after that relationship ends,  
you tell your friends you're learning to be alone but  
when the doors close  
you keep your bed warm with new bodies.  
none of them, not one,  
is enough to melt the ice in your bones;  
and, their nails clawing into your skin, you think  
*is that all there is?*

scars bloom before they fade;  
and your arms are a field of flowers,  
stained indigo by the  
setting  
sun

later, you're alone and it's silent  
and there is nothing, just cold, sad nothing  
and you're sure that  
that's all there will ever be.

she sends you pictures of cats  
and makes sure you wake up in the mornings  
and her laugh is  
oh,  
her laugh is  
the glow of dawn against fresh snow,  
the dusk light spilling over clouds,  
her eyes are the summer sunshine  
the luster of stars  
capable of illuminating  
the most violent, violet galaxies

in her arms,  
you are safe,  
and you are happy,  
and you are free

and what anyone else thought,  
what they told you,  
what they beat into your skin  
never mattered

those tired, dusty, lonely years  
were never all there was;

they fade  
under the brilliance of our  
technicolor  
love.

Art by Annie Shi.  
To see an illustrated version of this piece:  
<http://www.annieshi.me/pride-project>