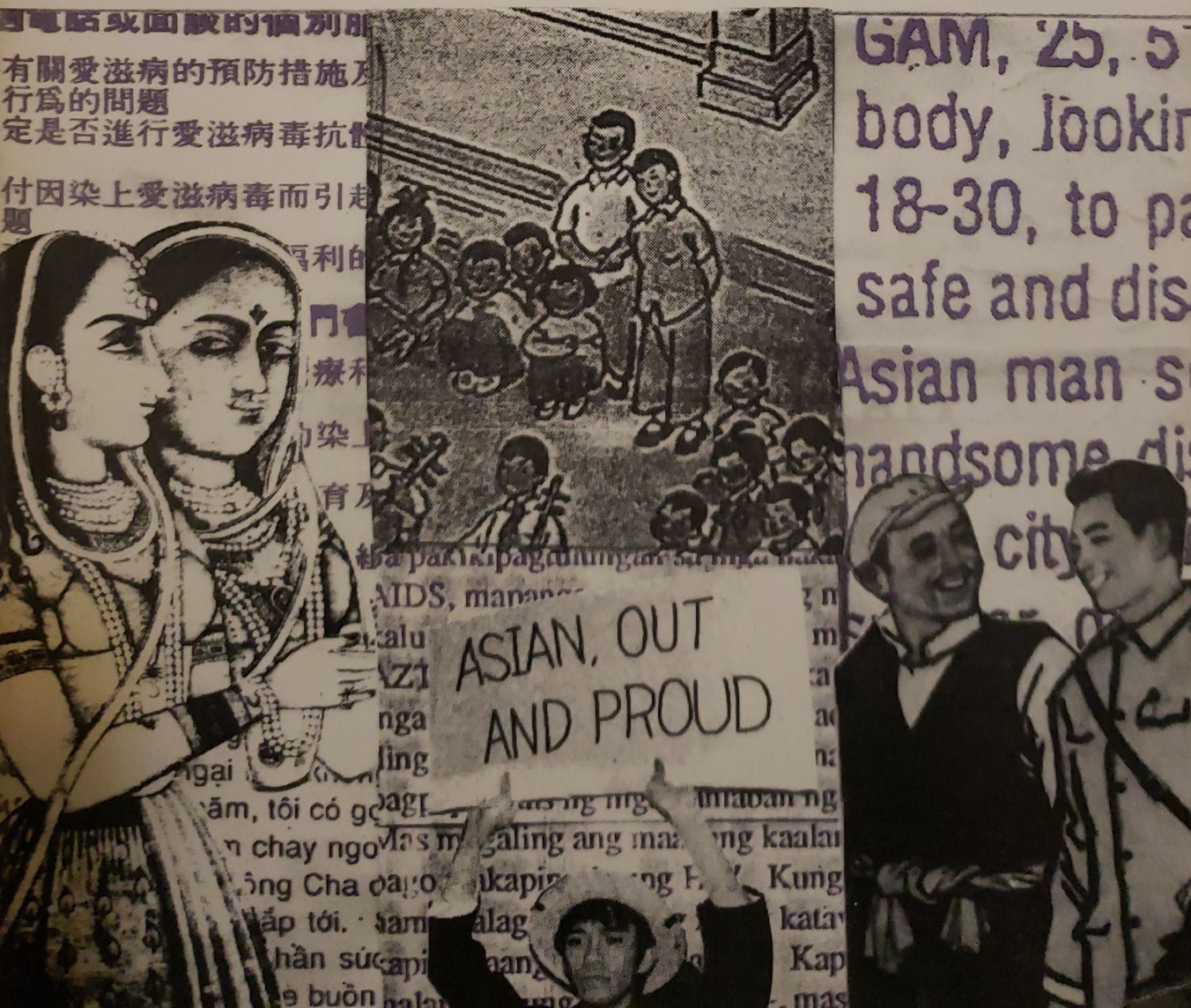




Witness Aloud

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Illegitimate Intimacy

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When was the last time (and how many more?) that you can remember sunbathing beside your friend – or perhaps more than a friend – who has just shaved his pale/slim/child-like legs because he liked “the texture”? Surrounding you are old Caucasian men with sagging and sunburnt skin + bony limbs + mountainous bellies. They sometimes look in your direction with condescending smiles, perhaps erotic smiles, but ultimately ambiguous because you are not sure – or perhaps they aren’t even sure. Ambiguity. Because you don’t know for sure, and how much, I mean, to what extent does he like you? And to what extent does he like his girlfriend?

“Do you think I can have sex here?” he asks nonchalantly, his half-chinese eyes squinted under the cancer-causing ultraviolet.

“I don’t know, it’s kind of public here, don’t you think?” I say, and touch his tiny nipple. “I don’t want to have sex here.”

“Who says I’m going to have sex with you,” he says. “I mean maybe with a girl.”

I can’t tell if he’s joking or not, but I take it as a joke anyway and say, “Have you ever had sex with a guy?”

“Don’t tell me you’re not a guy,” he says humorlessly.

"You're no fun," I say, remembering our long walk home one night. In order to kill time, we played this game where we pretended to be closeted boys. He was the homophobic one while I was the one trying to "come out" to him.

"It's a boring game," he says, tilts his head slightly and scratches the side of his abdomen.

"Very banal," I agree.

He turns and lies prostrate against the ground to hide his erection. I touch him – running a finger down the crack of depression in the middle of his back – to show some desire for intimacy.

"Your penis is so white," I say.

"I'm sorry," he says. "I can't help it."

"I think it's cute," I try to assure him, knowing of his sometimes insecurity over his pale colored skin.

"There are no women here," he says.

"It's kind of male here, kind of gay, I suppose."

You may tan easily, because of the natural pigment of your asian skin, but he doesn't. He doesn't get tanned. He just turns red, like when he is drunk. But it's kind of neat you know, because the redness gives his face more of an innocent/childlike look. Even cuter: like the face of some animal. The redness doesn't last. Soon his skin starts to peel, and you feel guilty because you're the one who promises to bring sun-tan lotion but you always forget.

We're walking together, side-by-side, clothes hiding our temporary nakedness. With a weighty dizziness from lying too long under the sun, I walk sipping an icy drink in my hand. Every now and then we bump into each other – maybe it's just my clumsiness – because we walk too close to each other. He asks, so I hand him my drink. I watch him take a few sips.

"Are you still sick?" I ask.

"A little," he says.

"I don't want to get your cold," I say and sip on the straw which his lips just left.

"I don't believe you can transmit cold this way," he says, "and furthermore, you would have gotten it already from sleeping with me last night."

"I guess."

An asian girl with a beret and knapsack wave to us – to him specifically. We stop before her (a stranger to me) who smiles at him. They exchange greetings while I stand sipping toward the remaining ice, still sipping for the molten water mixed with the sugar at the base.

"This is Nancy," he introduces the girl to me, "and this is my friend Daniel."

"Hi," I say and add a smile of courtesy.

"What are you guys doing?" she asks.

"Just hanging out," he replies.

Not long, we're walking again, and not long, you part with him with mutually noncommittal remarks: "I'll see you later" or just "Bye." Usually a hug, but hardly a kiss. Perhaps once you remember, both of you kissed each other goodbye – a mutual one – and your eyes met but immediately you looked away. Once. How long did it last? A second or two? How transient? Perhaps at that moment you felt an overwhelming sense of mutuality or even happiness (the big banal word), yet you feel all the same every day.

His saliva on your lips evaporates so quickly. It doesn't leave a trace, not even the slightest smell, but once again the ambiguity.

He has a girlfriend all right. To you she is just another generic asian girl whom you selfishly hope that he doesn't care that much about. You hope that it (his having a girlfriend) is merely a social pretense. Perhaps you even hope that his bisexuality is a social pretense as if being half heterosexual (like being half White/chinese) makes a difference. What kind of a difference may it be?

Oh, the difference is that they have a committed relationship despite the fact that the relationship is so called "open." He can claim her to be her girlfriend and she can claim him to be his boyfriend. (Excuse my mistakes in using English personal pronouns because in spoken chinese there is no gender difference in pronouns.) He says in a party that he can't flirt with you because most of his girlfriend's friends are present, yet he secretly touches you on the butt while the others' eyes are somewhere else. You may enjoy this veil of illegitimacy until you cannot rationalize your relationship with him, cannot compare it to a pre-existing model, cannot stop identifying with the illegitimate mistress or the jealous homosexual lover in Hollywood movies.

"Let's have violent sex," I propose while lying beside him on the tight twin bed in his dormitory. "I'll tie you up and then stab you with an ice-pick just when you're about to come."

He lets out a grunt. Why isn't he amused by my black humor? I pick up the pillow and pretend to suffocate him with it. We start play struggling with each other until I am screaming and until he stops tickling me. Shortly after we catch our breaths we are lying beside the other, our legs entangling each other's.

"Sometimes I wonder if you'd really act out what you say," he says.

"Act out what?"

"Your stupid violent fantasies."

"I'm just joking. Do you think I'm capable of murdering you? Come on."

"I don't know," he says and brushes his finger back and forth against the back of my hand. "You're joking but you joke about these things all the time."

"No, I won't kill you. I won't add another infamous homosexual murder case to history."

"Let's try going to sleep," he says and turns his back to face me.

"Okay."

Silence. Darkness.

You don't sleep with him that often. Maybe this is precisely why you enjoy sleeping with him. Even his slight body odor in bed is welcoming. It's an intimate experience, more than the platonic intimacy. It's not like sleeping with your father or mother or any other friends because sleeping with them lacks the air of eroticism, the sensuality and the occasional erections.

If you're staying on for another year, you'll go out with him. But you'll be leaving, and you feel selfish to ask him to commit. Furthermore, you know that he likes you but doesn't love you. You fear that if you ask for more he'll just be scared and run off and never see you again.

In bed again, beside him, in darkness with the moonlight spilling from the window. I survey the darkroom and see the empty bed of his roommate. His roommate hardly sleeps at home because he has a girlfriend. The digital figures of the clock are the only luminosity. I cannot make out the shapes – made up of angles, round edges and straight lines – on his desk. I shift in bed and lay my arm softly on his back.

"Are you awake?" I ask.

"Hum?" he mumbles.

"I had a dream some nights ago," I say, "I dreamt about Deana. She was crying to me because she thought – Did she know about our... whatever?"

"Yeah, I told her."

"It's not the reason why you broke up with her, is it?"

"No, don't worry. She's not mad at you. The only one she should be mad at is me."

You don't know if you should feel better or disappointed or perhaps

both when they break up because of "stagnation" and not because of you. Some nights I lie in bed, in my own bed, in my own room, alone. I went to sleep early because I couldn't bear to wait for his phone call.

He left a message earlier on your answering machine and you left a message on his answering machine. You sat at home waiting for him to call. So I am now in bed desperately trying to sleep so as to kill time (or perhaps I am writing now just to kill time). It's like *Waiting for Godot*.

I wake up in the morning and realize that I haven't spoken to him yet and I was the last one who left a message. I try to busy myself running errands the whole morning – including working out in the gym – and at noon I am home again. While fixing lunch, I decide to call him and do so. He answers the phone and says, "Hi, Daniel."

The conversation ends with him saying, "I'll talk to you later." You see, "talk to you later" is non-committal as compared to "call you later" because you can still talk to someone ten years later on the street and he cannot accuse you of promising to call, but didn't.

When I talk to my parents on the phone, I know that they still hope that I'll eventually get married to a girl. Homosexuality is just a transient stage. I want them to take me seriously, to take my sexuality seriously. But how can they when there is no prevalent cultural model of a permanent homosexual relationship?

If they're liberal enough they'll think that we're just kids fooling around and don't know what we want. Queer asian boys are fickle things. They still hope that we can change, especially when my parents are still quite chinese despite having lived in America for twenty, thirty years. I know what I want, but without showing them concrete evidence – like a stable boyfriend – they will not believe me.

"I have a lover," you often want to say to them, but you can never be so sure to claim him to be your lover because...

"Why don't you just take a plane to Yale? You know I'll worry about you. I mean you can sell your car here, fly up there and buy a new one," said my father in chinese.

"Someone is driving up with me," I reply, "I want to drive up there with him because I can take the opportunity to spend some time with him."

Silence.

"He's someone I like a little." I have to qualify my liking with "little" because I'm just not sure.

"Is he clean?" Dad asks.

"I guess." I am offended because I know that he wouldn't have asked

the same question if he were a girl.

"What does he do?"

"He studies Integrative Biology, and he's in the University Chorale. He sings well."

You remember once you attended that concert. You knew he wanted you to show up because...

You were sitting alone in the audience and his straight friends and roommates were sitting elsewhere in the concert hall. You also knew that somewhere in the concert hall sat his parents – a middle-aged chinese man and Caucasian woman – with his two brothers. You were there, with the program in one hand, respectfully groomed in silk shirt and dressed pants as compared to the "QUEER AND ASIAN" T-shirt that you pride wearing daily to shock.

Members of the chorale enter the stage above which is an infinite series of the organ's silvery pipes. They all seem so phallic to me. All dressed in black, the women walk on stage. I spot her ex-girlfriend Deana to be among them. She probably doesn't notice me, but I can see her smiling to the girl beside her. He comes on stage among the choir boys who are all dressed in a white shirt, tie and black pants. I don't want to look at him, because I feel that he desires not to acknowledge my presence.

They sing Fauré's *Requiem*.

After the concert, you walk out to greet him – not knowing how to greet him. Cannot kiss him. Cannot hug him. Cannot touch him. Remember well that his parents are there and they do not know of his sexuality, of you, of you sleeping with their son.

"Hi," I say to him as I avoid looking in his eyes, "It's great. I really enjoy it."

"Thanks for coming," he says. "Oh, this is my brother. This is Daniel."

His brother, looking like a younger him, says a brief "hi" to me. His brother somehow walks off leaving us before each other. He looks different from usual – politely groomed, no longer in T-shirt and shorts.

"Have you met my parents?"

"Briefly," I say.

"I'm driving my friends home. Would you like a lift?"

"No, it's okay. I'll be fine."

"All right."

A breeze of cold wind slips past above my collar and licks the back of my neck.

"I'll see you later then," he says, adding a vague smile.

"Sure."

Not a touch. We part. He walks toward his parents who are mingling with his legitimate straight friends at a corner. I walk off into the night. I dare not look back but keep walking straight, maintaining a dignified pose with my chest out. I know he doesn't want his parents to catch my effeminate gait, to even know that I am not a "man." The wind keeps blowing against me as I try to disremember the illegitimate moments of our intimacy.