

One-Liner

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After “The Chart” by Rafael Campo

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of this new hospital admission begins with eighty-three-year-old Asian female—it could be my grandmother, who taught me the tongue of her mothers while teaching me to make beef noodle soup; or it could be the Korean lady, back home at the H-mart who updates me on the freshest fruits, never forgets to slip me guava candy; if not the Taiwanese woman who runs the dim sum place, yells if you don’t pay cash or stick chopsticks in your rice bowl, wears jade pendants and swears on her life that they bring her luck; it could also be the Hmong women who smokes during her lunch breaks between alleyways, always with the most beautiful and intricate nails, pink, she tells you, is her favorite color; slightly paler hue than the nails of the Vietnamese lady down the block whose worry lines her eyes, noticeable despite the cream she dabs between pauses in conversations; and when the attending asks me what language I speak, not Cantonese or Korean or Vietnamese, and only Mandarin, I feel some deep hot shame swell up from inside, swallowing me, reducing me to nothing but a label.