

### Excerpt from “Mrs. Lu”

Husband,

Even though our store has long been gone, boycotted and then closed, I see their faces before me each night. Some gleaming dark, some ashen and dry, some with gold tones like yours or mine. They taunt me, pull their eyes, jibber in mock Chinese, as they lay batteries on the counter. They make me repeat myself in my terrible English, argue, then yell about the prices we had to charge in our small store. Even the older ones, with their children or friends at their sides, would swear, laugh as they walked away. Some stared hard, not speaking at all. Their eyes burned me, standing small behind the counter. No friend to see, talk to but the camera in the corner.

You’re surprised. Yes, I admit it. You were away so often, hunting down inventory, waiting tables at Chinese Palace, trying to repay our friends, our cousins, so we could call this store our own. I missed you, my heart and feet sore, ten hours a day, six days a week. I thought about our son, his schooling, his trouble making friends—he’s shy, just like me. I prayed to God to watch over him. I know he’s everywhere. Maybe He could see me through the camera, as I tried to remember kindness, the ones who tried to smile like me at first.

Some things happened I never told you. Remember about a week before the girl, before I shot Akeisha? You asked me why my tears fell into the soup you’d brought home for supper; I could not answer. It seemed too silly for tears, for words even.

The store that day felt swollen with heat. The fan whipped hot breaths onto my skin, onto the customers. I was sweeping, ready to close. In the corner near the ketchup, soups, and soy sauce, my foot brushed against something. A rotting egg roll. Broken open and stinking, it must have been baked long in the sun, or fished out from a garbage bin for maggots to squirm at its torn edges.

I stopped talking to them. Just wrote prices on paper. Some just laughed, other tore up the paper. The Akeisha girl was one of the louder ones. She usually came in with her friends,

laughing and talking, thumbing through the magazines right in front of the counter. She was alone that day. Ripped up the paper, yelled in my face. I could feel her breath and drops of spit. “SPEAK ENGLISH! TALK to me! You come in here, into our place, you better show some RESPECT!! Do you even UNDERSTAND?” She slammed her change on the counter, turned as I, shaking, lifted the gun and pulled like you showed me. I closed my eyes. Small thunder, then her body hit tile. Blood and quiet. Quiet for a long time.

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