

# Two Poems

by Annika Le

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## Polydipsia

Vietnamese words taste  
pickled in my mouth—  
saliva pools out from glands like  
rain gutters in a Saigon monsoon

When I attempt to backbend  
my tongue into unfamiliar tones,  
my grandmother's forehead furls  
into a question mark, and the  
uncles burst into contractions of  
synchronized laughter

To me, the glyphs on letters look like  
ranges of mountains or falling tides  
that mimic the moon's loop—they taste  
meaningless against my teeth

On the Lunar holiday, we must wish  
New Year blessings in Vietnamese  
before she bestows the lucky red parcels—  
they sit under her elbow and  
against her ribs like armor:

Chúc mừng năm mới

What leaves my lips is a windstorm  
of whispers, misspelled mush,  
a lotus flower without its seeds,  
my jaw now severed like  
the lost string of a guitar

Again, the contractions of  
laughter, this time from the aunts  
and cousins, too—it descends  
from lips and pools on the tile

I grab a sponge from the belly  
of the kitchen sink, and attempt  
to extract my mispronunciations  
from the floorboards

## Plate of Plums

Grandpa said to  
plant a plum pit and  
it will split the soil to  
sprout high

Each evening, she  
cracks the blemished skin,  
gnaws away at yellow meat,  
and suckles the seed  
with her tongue

till every pocket clears of flesh  
and it lays white like  
human bone in her palm

With a toss, she whispers wishes  
and the ferns tuck the pit away  
into their pockets

In early mornings, she checks  
her plot of land as though  
it's a wristwatch

but all that's new are  
dabs of dew on grass blades  
from the sleeptalk of clouds.