

CHICKEN (short story)

It was easy to spot Danny at the airport. He was the only other Asian, waving his arms like windshield wipers, bouncing slightly off the balls of his feet. We did not kiss; I did not like public affection. Still I knew to offer him my arms. His entire body softened in my embrace, as it always did. I made it, he said. I made it.

We were both graduate students in our mid-twenties. We'd met in Boston six months ago, on Grindr; neither of us had been looking for anything. I had returned to Kentucky five weeks ago, just in time for my mother's hip surgery. I was helping her recover, or so I hoped. I didn't tell her that to come home, I'd turned down a writing fellowship back north. She wouldn't understand. It was all status, no money, as airy and useless as my poetry. I also didn't warn her about Danny's past, even though she'd want to play cards during his visit—her favorite game required a fourth person. I knew how she'd react if I told her. Her brother lost all that money to mahjong years ago, and they no longer spoke.

The day I left Boston, Danny had taken my hands in his, and his face adopted the kind of confident look I usually had to muster up. He had this miraculous ability to collect himself when I most needed it. I joked that this was the secret to love: only one of us was allowed to be crazy at any given time. He grabbed hold of my very full suitcase and shuffled me out of his apartment. I'll be just dandy, he said. A new beginning, remember?

We had never slept apart two nights in a row. But one of his shrinks had high hopes about my going home. To her, this was the change we most needed—for Danny to manage his issues by himself, without me. Indeed, it was a month later and here he was, we were together once more.