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Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

lemon bleeding (ekphrasis)

SONATA IN G MINOR: HENRY ECCLES, II. ALLEGRO CON SPIRITO

Growing up, getting hot water was an extreme sport. I took many cold showers and had to make sure no one else was using the hot water.

Growing up, we collected water in basins and buckets, kept them in the corner of shower stalls. Whenever the water would come back on, someone would yell in joy.

When I was young, I couldn't speak Tagalog, but I always knew certain words: *tubig*, *batok*, *kuryente*. *Water*, *to strike on the nape*, *electricity*. We were always asking for these things. There was no need for a special occasion. Some days the water would go. Some days the electricity. Growing up, I wanted to be rich. When I was a child, my father would tell me that he only wanted me to be happy. Whenever my brother and I got in trouble he chose to look away. He likes to stay out of things. He is a good father.

Growing up, I drank squeezed lemons in the daytime instead of cow milk and practiced the piano by emergency flashlight.

Growing up, I learned that the foam settling on top of the apple juice was better than the juice itself. I learned not to twist the dimmers for the yellow lights because they made the electricity bills go up too high.

When I was young, we slept in one room and ran the electric fan through hot summer nights. Back then, I couldn't speak Hokkien as well as I wanted to, but I knew how to swear in it because my father liked to open the second story window of the master bedroom to yell at his secretary. These days he doesn't yell as much. He complains about the fact that I'm not Chinese enough. That I'm losing who I'm supposed to be. He clings onto his beliefs, like: a family that eats together, stays together.

In my new house I leave my air-conditioner on all day and I make a playlist called "shower in the dark" and fall asleep to it. Once, I even stand under the shower for nearly half an hour. The shower glass and mirrors steam until I can barely see. My mother yells at me from outside the door because it's time for lemon juice. The lights are all off because I want them to be. My father speaks to me in Hokkien and I respond in the English he hates so much. I choke on apple slices and the lemons make my jaw ache; they tear at my throat and stomach lining. The men of the house all eat lunch without me.

My father tells me that consistency is key but I can never tell when he'll come home for Christmas. My father also tells me that movement is essential, that you can't stop working because life is a race, that there is no time for yourself in the pursuit for success.

My brother tells me that hard work beats talent. I agree with him. At the dinner table, my mother decides how much rice I can eat and my father tells me that girls can't be fat. My brother opts for silence. We are good children.

My brother and I used to play. We made makeshift homes out of blankets and cardboard. We ran outside and talked to the neighborhood kids that played *patintero*. I wasn't cool enough for any of that, but I wanted to be. Some days I ran so much I'd get an asthma attack.

In my new house, hardly anyone speaks. We all operate on different time zones. I am oftentimes addressed sideways: my parents ask each other questions on why I am the way I am. Once, my grandfather asks my father why I'm not wearing slippers. On Sundays, my mother tells me to watch livestreamed church. In my spare time I allow myself to look back on my old life. I open folders and binders of photocopied music scores. My music teacher once drew a right hand on the corner of a score and wrote *curve pinky*. These days, time passes quickly. Most days, my mother tells me to fix my posture. I wake up every morning and hang onto the sunrise.

My father tells me that whatever goes up, goes down. Drinks appear on my desk like clockwork. There are periodic weigh-ins a few times a day. The stock market crashes but my mother tells me the stocks will go up again. I tell her I know this because of my father. We're a machine. In my private Instagram posts I don't use punctuation, especially towards the ends of the captions. I tell people on Instagram that I never had a Webkinz account to begin with and then at night I make a long emotional post on an Instagram account only my friends follow and type: "you think it can't get any worse & then god deletes your webkinz account" because sometimes I follow my father's advice: I keep moving. Who cares what's real? I take pictures of the sunrise, knowing things will pass. I gulp the squeezed lemons as fast as I can but they sit, stabbing sharply at the pit of my stomach for an hour after.