

Again

by Hannibal Tabu

Their footsteps stopped suddenly, leaving them staring at one another across the bleak expanse of playground at south Los Angeles' Gompers Middle School. His uniform's white polo shirt felt too restrictive as he watched her budding solar plexus rise and fall anxiously. A kickball fell from her finespun fingers, bouncing disinterestedly away at an oblique angle, a distant shadow from a 767 drifting across its path. One thought held court in each of their minds: "I *know* you ..."

Carefully, as if they each feared the cracked surface of the ground were incapable of withstanding the weight of their connection, they walked towards one another. He didn't notice the razor thin canvas of his Eastsport backpack fall from his left shoulder, his olive green science book bursting free of the half-closed zipper to land open to the section on geology.

Mere feet from one another, they couldn't find anything to say. The drape of her braids somehow reminded him of oppressively sticky hot air and thick bunches of trees everywhere. His lips, held open as if his mouth couldn't hold in everything he wanted to say, inexplicably brought her lurching thoughts of seasickness and cries of anguish, and fear of never seeing him again.

They stood there, saying nothing, almost shaking with not knowing. This wasn't like the time they bumped into each other on the corner of Lennox and 123rd, him on the way to play at some smoky jazz place with Cab Calloway, her following her husband home after failing to make the landlord see reason, her every possession grasped in one hand. It wasn't even like the time he'd looked up from his Shaolin texts to thank the warlord's daughter for bringing water and staring into these same bright eyes.

Maybe this time they wouldn't run.

