

Miss

by Kari Nguyen

On Saturday mornings, by noon, the delivery car comes from Boston and unloads fresh bread and sandwiches, pork ribs and ground pork stuffed inside of breads and buns and banana leaves, bean shakes, and sticky rice desserts. I watch the man come in, unpacking boxes and arranging them on a table near the checkout counter. My husband clutches his basket, studying the delivery, and walks back and forth behind the table, then around to the other side of it, every now and then taking up an item and examining it at eye level. I stand back and watch him. He is lovely, on Saturday mornings, perusing the fare. I note his winter jacket, and remind myself to sew that button back on when I can. It's the third one from the top, popped off two weeks ago.

He moves around the table, slowly filling his basket. Walking up to him, I put a hand on his shoulder and nod my head toward the candy aisle, and I leave him, planting a kiss on his face as I walk by. I don't like to speak English here, though the two girls at the counter use it with customers. They are sisters, and they ring up the purchases, their hands flying over the old registers, entering prices they know by heart. High behind them is a shelf holding Buddha figurines of various sizes and colors, I don't know if they're for sale, and beneath the glass counter there are shelves filled with old, yellowing, dusty boxes of Asian creams and medicines that no one ever buys. I imagine them as magical elixirs, powerful potions, waiting to be discovered, like in a movie, some untold force unleashed upon their purchase and use.

Walking across the front of the store, I turn and head down one of the first aisles, the one with the bright packages of candy and cookies. This side of the store holds on to the overwhelming smell of fish, concentrated and heavy, from the tanks near the back, and I hold my breath. Down at the opposite end, near the tanks, I see an old woman coming around the corner. She is pushing an empty cart, and at first I think she's stumbled, but then I see she is dancing.

Dancing! And there's no music, anywhere, but she's shifting her hips, and there goes a twirl, she's spinning, and there's nothing in her cart. I watch as she slowly dances up the aisle, moving towards me, and I wonder if I should avert my eyes, but I don't, I just watch as she twirls again, and now she's close to me and I watch as she comes up, and she's smiling, and I realize I'm not holding my breath anymore. She stops her cart beside me and reaches over, taking my hands in hers, and says something to me, words I can't understand, the meaning of life or what happens after you die, something wise and important. Then she pats my arm, and moves off with her cart, walking now, as if she's spent all of her youth, after all this time.

I hurry off after her, but she's turned the corner, and I don't see her, perhaps a trick of my eye. Instead I see my husband, walking towards me with a plastic bag in hand, and I ask him, trying to remember the words the old woman spoke to me, and he looks confused. I must have said it wrong. I don't find her again that day, but I come back every Saturday, hoping.

