

# Rubble

by Matt Kang

Rubber bands were all we had, so we shrugged them up our arms until it got to the point that our fingers fell asleep. As per our ritual, we waited for the sun to go down, our backs planted against the yellowing walls of our flat, all the furniture gone, pawned. She packed the needles, she smiled at me as she flicked the barrel and prepped the needle with the smallest squirt, only enough for her little theatrics so as not to waste more than a drop of her godly nectar. “Ready, Alligator?” she said. It’s an ancient pet name; how it came to be is long gone to me. I nodded, cracked a smile. I made a mock-gesture of putting on surgical rubber gloves. That’s my bit part.

I do this for her. My body tells me I want this. But my mind, not the part that feels, but rather the part that does the thinking, holds out, remembers who I am, who I do this for and in a way, is unrelated, a third party to this wreckage. It is the final frontier, my outer space—from the wavelike onset of euphoria that breaks over my body like a bucket of numbness splashing against my skin, my viscera, my life. The vantage of that mind is no more than a closed circuit camera feeding into an empty security room. No one’s home.

We planted the needle into the summit of our track scars, right underneath the crook and the fluorescent halo of the rubber band, and we shoot, her thumb on my plunger and mine on hers. My mind fabricated the smell of gunpowder as I pushed down.

“I love you.” Always and only in those first seconds of the high she said the sentence. The word “you” reverberated around the room. “You” crashed against the truth and gravity of the floorboards and the walls and the sheer emptiness of what once was full, and the word, the word became “it” instead.

I said it back, but she didn't hear it. At least she was wearing a smile. That's all I ever wanted to see on her.

