
POETRY | SPRING 2013

Room 915

By Emily Yuan

Hair unkempt, face unshaven
Skin rough and tanned from the elements
Huddled at the edge of the bed
In a gown that exposed the back;
The mountains of each vertebrae
Nestled together to yield the semilunar trace.
The body had grown used to that posture.

Bare ashen legs, dead skin flaked
Like mica with each movement.
And on the feet? Three pairs of socks.
Socks on feet means socks for keeps.
To keep with saved apples,
Jello cups, half eaten sandwiches
And one pair of sodden, ripped khakis
All in a bag marked: Personal Belongings of
R— L—.

Course hands sheltered tightly
Underneath thin arms that wrapped the chest
But the fingertips peeked out
Like antennas to the outside world.
The grime that collected underneath them—
A testament to each day lived.

Vacant eyes like a statue's
Looking beyond the unknown, sterile place.
A sparkle glimmers in the pool of gray!
A reminder that long ago these eyes
Were more than an instrument of the senses,
Counting cars, counting people, counting lights
A game that helps the time pass.

Mind wavers like uncertain sunlight
Attention flickers in synchrony
There is focus on the day.
I'm outta here tomorrow!
...next Thursday!...the Thursday after!...
Take care of yourself when I'm gone, little sister!
Said with a grin that revealed the rotting teeth.

Emily Yuan, M.S., Narrative Medicine, Columbia University, wrote "Room 915," about a homeless man with an extended hospital stay, as a part of her coursework in Narrative Medicine. She is passionate about lending a voice to marginalized and disadvantaged populations.
