



TAM NGUYEN

don't take me back to summers

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to the wet junes and their knee-deep puddles
to the closest I made to the bones
which is to taste a bullet in my mouth and
saw a speck of my mother's gods
don't take me back to the summer where
I meditated on the account nameless dead man
on the lukewarm afterglow
of the sun where all I did was watching
shadows that looked like mine
passing
and chose to live instead
don't take me back to the summer when I
first learned to hold my tears in the sea
it freed me
like the miles-long strolls away from home
where my vision boiled down to
the deathbed in a wall-less shack
on the side of the paddy field
don't take me back to the summer
where I became a poet commissioning words
with honorarium paid in ghosts
made me so wealthy in hell
I wanted to show g what he actually meant
by saying *the gays are so artsy and talented*
don't take me back to the summer nights I left
barbarisms' *heaviest breather* on repeat for
I occasionally forgot there's still air
to the time when nothing guaranteed
me not puzzling anyone
when I open my mouth and do what a boy would
to another bewildered boy
while counting on each other's
trembling fingers until one of us
closed our eyes nearly for good
don't take me back to summer I bisected
my silence-thick house revealing
my exceedingly buoyant self about to break



and look

I could go on and on about this
giggle some more

cry some more

replace the *don't* with nothing else

and see what it took and continues to take
me to enter summers



It's possible for something to weigh the world

It's possible for something to weigh the world, your hands. This is the quietest place, your chest. Years ago, I was so scared my body as hot as coming out of a nuclear explosion. But I swear, I saw the bedrock and almost mistook it for your skin. I admit that I had imagined us kissing, eyes closed, but it was like swallowing fistfuls of herb balls. A country isn't a country until you forget your boyhood. I sat in the dark and let my country outgrow me. I tried. But the toothless wolves were so nimble they'd only open their mouths for mercy. Once you told me you'd hit the straight punks if they make me feel uneasy, I already thought about how I, silent as a house, started picking up shards of broken lilacs falling from your eyes as you stepped into the water; how I'd end up drowning myself all over again, on purpose. To walk in winter boulevards and still burning; to devour vast autumn skies and still hungry. I'm ashamed to admit that the safest landing for me isn't onto my mother's arms. Hands in my pocket, I watch the most grotesque parts of myself turning into a monster. Still, you were there. I landed onto your globed shoulders instead. I could have gnawed my fangs to suck off the last fungus sprouting from



your neck, but I chose to surrender.
The most magical thing is to
crash into each other without
a code of conduct and still, your
pulses so real you almost want
to die again and see what happen.
Once, in a cheap motel
room in a nameless town, there
was no mirror. So the only way
to see myself was to look at him,
and we were both ready to ask
for forgiveness for the rest of our lives.
Look, we're so small, we're almost
nothing. I'm afraid to see too far,
as much as an eye that peels
light off the ozone, just to reveal
another inexhaustible part of
darkness. The suburban afternoons
we spent together so short I'd
make a finger-cross every time
you left the room. I swear I'd set
fire to the moon and watch it lit.
We are proven to become
vulnerable before sentences that
end with *please*. I said *please*, and
fed the ghosts what they wanted,
and hiccupped through the night.
Don't crawl, just lay there,
the ghosts said. I learnt the
best life hack is to muster until
there's nothing left but myself,
to enter a body, your body.
I'm not gonna lie. Your beard is
quirky enough for me to plant
every flower I mishandled before.
But meanwhile, I promise I won't
hide underwater, even though
it's true that my corrupted lungs
can actually hold much longer.



BIOGRAPHY

Tam Nguyen is a poet and emerging art writer, born and raised in the south end of Vietnam. His creative works have appeared and are forth-coming on various journals and magazines such as [Heavy Feather Review](#), [Softblow](#), [diaCRITICS](#) (Diasporic Vietnamese Artist Network), [MAYDAY](#), [Overheard](#), [Dryland](#), among others. He's working on his undergraduate degree in Art and Media Studies at Fulbright University Vietnam with an interest in modern and contemporary art histories in Southeast Asia.