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Three Poems: qhuab ke; I Was Basking in the Lights of New York City, You Were Buried in Laos; In Pretense

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Creative and Literary Works

Three Poems

Chelsey See Xiong
Little Laos on the Prairie

qhuab ke

when the song of our ancestors has been sung
and the echoes of the qeej and nruas
ceased to only whisper
I will be home,
but first on the back of a horse
made of woods and my loved ones' cries,
to a place I don't belong
south of the Mekong border
to gather the remnants of my birth

for 13 days I will not be close enough,
as in dreams, we are separated by reality and
in death, we are separated by time, space,
and borders

so you will lay in your home in Laos and wait
and I will wander
and wonder how soon my loved ones
will release me
from south of the Mekong
to be home
with you

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I Was Basking in the Lights of New York City, You Were Buried in Laos

If I tell you how
in the land of concrete and glass, your
skin could feel the chill of the winter creeping
through every inch of your body,
if you stay longer, you
could taste the atmosphere on your tongue
in the form of thin layers of ice,
would you stay with me?

You won't.

You seek the warmth of the sun,
the heat of fire burning the air inside
your home,
the ashes of the incense,
an open sky where the moon and
the stars would lay side by side
above the sleeping rooster,
who would call you from your slumber
every morning.

So I carry your love with me
on the white thread my father tied
around my wrist,
on the copper snake bracelet my mother
bought me,
as they may be the bridge between the
home of my father in Xam Nua,
and my mother's in Xiangkhouang,
and the land that holds you
deeply cuddled within its fingers,

and I closed my eyes to dream
while standing,
wishing to see you reach out to me
from the crowd
but while I was basking in the lights of New York City,
you were buried in Laos.

In Pretense

why do you pretend like
you didn't know when it died?

when it was dying,
you heard it,
you felt it,
for miles and miles

when it died,
you wrapped it in silk roses,
laid it in a casket,
and left it open
for the world to see

but it was only you,
in the back looking at it,
with the doors closed
behind you
so no one could get in

you covered it with fresh flowers
to hide the smell of death,
to hide its decay,
to pretend you didn't know

it was dead

About the Author

Chelsey See Xiong identifies as Hmong American. She has published about Asian Americans in ethnic publications, including A-List Magazine, The Hmong Tribune, The kNOw Youth Media, Txhawb Magazine, and she started the online platforms and led the digital editorial work for Asian Pacific Review at her alma mater, California State University, Fresno. She worked on the Hmongstory 40 project, where she supported programs, communications, organized volunteers, researched, and wrote for the exhibition. She received the Critical Refugee Collective grant given by the University of California Critical Refugee Collective in 2017, for which she funded the printing of the zine series MAI. In 2018, she helped organize the Legacies

of War LaoNow2018 Creative Feast in NYC. She also co-founded and is currently the co-editor of maivmai, a digital Hmong American Literary Press. You can find her poetry in Files, Cockroaches and Poetry (2017), published by the Chicana Writers and Artists Association at Fresno State.

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