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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 Chicax Writers and Artists Association at Fresno State.



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