

thrust

BY ERIC TANG

We were walking together when he grabbed my hand to pull me off the sidewalk and into an adjacent alley. It was obscured from passerby, dark and empty, except for a single tungsten lamp, which cast a warm, orange light on my skin. He took a step in front of me, turned, leaned in, and quietly asked if I was sure.

I was. I told him that he should be as violent as he could, explaining that I had a feeling that he wasn't capable of hurting me in any serious way. He shoved me and made a sound, then said something about having fought someone within the past couple days. He used the word "tough" more than once. I shrugged and smiled.

He flashed an expression for a moment, then squared up and faced me- posed, fists at chest level, elbows angled out awkwardly, weight bouncing slightly on his feet.

Up and down, up and down- excited-nervous? Eager.

I continued to grin, and asked if he even knew how to throw a punch. In response, he made a noise and lurched towards me. I flinched instinctively, and a fist swung wide into me. It struck, and I felt the spreading warmth of its blunt impact. His hand retracted, slid unceremoniously off of my upper arm. His lips pursed.

I told him to do it properly- to spread his legs slightly wider than his shoulders, plant his feet, and push through, hard. A full body motion, originating from his hips. I told him that it would be most effective if he acted as if I wasn't there. To thrust through me- as if I just happened to lay, inconveniently, between him and the thing that he wanted to destroy. He nodded and said that he understood.

I told him to go for it.
hurt me

He tried again. I could hear the cars driving in the street, see their headlights sweep past us and disappear. I could

hear his breath coming in the same uneven rhythm as my own.

Unsatisfied, he slouched, exhaled, and told me it was my turn. I asked if he was sure, and he insisted that he was. He insisted that the circumstances demanded a certain symmetry- that it wouldn't be fair to leave without matching bruises. He said that he wanted to be marked.

I protested halfheartedly, but my pulse quickened as I started to lean in, bringing elbows to my sides, fists to my face. Left foot forward, right foot back, both planted firmly in the pavement. My shadow spread long across the alley.

Power would funnel into the movement- from the ground, through my legs, and up to my torso. There, my body would begin to torque, condensing momentum into a vectored force which would run along my extending arm, humerus aligned with radius and ulna, aligned with carpus and metacarpus- osseous column built to direct energy towards a single point behind my fist.

It would be less an act of my own agency, and more situational happenstance that would flow through the architecture of my anatomy, tracing the arcing pathways of my muscle, sinew, and bone, releasing itself from me, and finding a new home at the momentary intersection between my body and his.

I moved.
He gasped.

Later, I would see how blood seeped into his subcutaneous tissue, see the way that it bloomed; rich red and blue hues that glowed just beneath the translucent outer layers of his skin, warm color pooling in his fleshy, tender parts.

Later, I would search my body for a corresponding mark, and find nothing.