

STACEY HO

on "Milman Parry's Waiting Room Rhapsody"  
JULIAN HOU

A number corresponding to the hexagesimal system chimes into her mind as she enters the building. Off-gassing carries the scent of jasmine and petroleum. She fingers the wires hidden under her clothes. There are no other people in the office, but she can feel a presence. Melodic conversations are heard through a wall hung with Rorschach-like paintings and fractal infographics. Again, a bell rings inside her mind. *Your inspiration for the day.* She gazes at the drawings, studying their overlapping pastel forms, and for a moment she feels a light sea breeze. She is throwing quarters off the side of a boat. "I see a pear," she says aloud.

The room is a witness. The room is a listener. The room is a vampire. It absorbs her. It is hungry for her experience. The scent of jasmine seeps into her pores. She is waiting. Many have waited here before her. They came and, after waiting for a long time, they gazed into a pool and saw only themselves gathered together.<sup>1</sup> When they came, they brought drugs that bent you open from the inside and steel that dug into your body. They brought anthropologists, missionaries, ethnographers, and scientists. She thinks of their bodies gathered together. She holds them away from the room. She refuses to say anything. A bell rings inside her mind. *We are ready for you.*

As she enters the office, a number enters into her mind that dates back to the base-60 system of counting practiced by ancient Mesopotamians. The off-gassing

that lingers throughout the building carries the scent of a light sea breeze. She traces her fingers along the lines of the recording device embedded under her skin. There is no one in the room. A bell rings inside her mind. She is handed a stack of idioms. *We hope you find these useful. Please take a number. Please take a seat.* The idioms are surprisingly functional, with a warm and familiar feel to their cadence. She settles into them. Their structure encloses her, but in this there is comfort. "Thank you," she says aloud.

When she was small she would play a game called Phonograph. One kid would be Singer, and yell silly jibberish into a pipe while another kid, Machine, hid under a table and yelled the silly words back. Another kid would be Gentleman and, wearing a suit, pith hat, and glasses, would pretend to take notes. Now in her suit and tie, with a wire taped onto her chest, she is playing this game again, passing as both Singer and Gentleman, while secretly also recording as Machine.<sup>2</sup>

She is waiting in the room. Many have waited here before her. She feels their voices gathering strength inside her. She pulls them away from the grasp of the room. They will not be recorded. There is a very long desk. She forgets how long the desk is. There is a stack of documents sitting on the desk. The top sheet is titled "How to Transcribe a Score from a Feeling". She scans the documents. There are three quarters lying on the desk, two tails and one head. *Yang line, unbroken: Biting*

*Through.*<sup>3</sup> This is the last thing she remembers.

*How to Transcribe a Score from a Feeling*

*On the night of a new moon, take a piece of White Rabbit candy and chew it 12 times. As you squeeze the sticky candy between your teeth, let a colour come into your mind. Hold the rabbit in your mouth. Let the milky sweetness spread across your tongue. Time is a circle and every story returns upon itself. You stand in this moment, drawing upon a well of stories to recognize where you are. Look at your hands. Look at yourself in the mirror. Look at the shape of your eyes, the colour of your skin. You are Shakespeare. You are Homer. Spit out the candy. We leave tonight.*

Once she was many Singers and knew many stories. But her stories were copied by the Gentlemen and used for their concerns. Now, in her suit and tie, with a wire taped onto her chest, she is playing a game. She is playing the game of the Gentlemen who recorded her voice. The game is also a story. She records the story of the Gentlemen. She wields a Machine. Gentleman's power flows from the room into Machine, then into her mouth. She smokes it down like a fat cigar. She is an enormously wealthy Gentleman with a fat gold chain hidden under her

suit and tie. She shoots a message into the air. It bounces off the ionosphere and quivers along radio wires. She is Machine. People go home and they turn her on and they listen to her songs on the radio. *Strangle your oppressors.* The songs tell a familiar story.

She is wearing a wire. Everything is familiar. She doesn't remember how she got home, but it is late at night. She is sitting at a table while drinking a glass of orange juice. There are earbuds in her ears. She is holding a small device in her left hand. Embedded in that device are the recordings she made in the room while waiting for Milman Parry. The room is a witness. The room is a listener. The room is a vampire. It eats her experience. She is waiting. As she focuses on the sound, she can hear a murmuring. It could be voices, or it could just be noise. She tries to make out a few words. The scent of jasmine floats through her ear. A shape takes hold of her thoughts. A chime goes off in the back of her mind. "I see a pear," she says aloud.

There is a knock at the door. It is time to leave. It is late at night.

## NOTES

1 “Since you have come as thirty birds, si-murgh, you will see thirty birds in this mirror. If forty of fifty were to come, it would be the same. Although you are now completely changed you see yourselves as you were before.”

2 “Another instance had Fewkes depicted in a Hopi dance, where a pipe representing the phonograph’s horn was placed on a table covered with a blanket. One performer yelled into the pipe, another hid under the blanket and yelled back jibberish, and a third, dressed as an ‘American,’ stood by and took notes.”

3 Hexagram 21 / Biting Through

Thunder and lightning:  
The image of **biting through**

Thus the kings of former times made firm the laws Through clearly defined penalties