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Elle Pérez

In Bloom

March 1 — April 8, 2018

"Photography is also an act of love." Hervé Guibert, 1981

Over time shape shifting has become a quick gesture, one that takes only a second or two to complete. It used to take longer, but the difference now is that its effects have become more evident.

After seven years of binding my ribs have formed a tighter cage around my heart, guided by a taut piece of fabric that has progressively constricted my back, lungs, my breathing, and my ability to walk up the stairs. All of this in pursuit of a new form: my body and this garment conspiring in a way that produces an emotion or a feeling, and makes my life at least manageable, if not alright.

After getting to know you for seven years we decide it's finally time to make a portrait. Stars sprinkle across my back as we walk down the street, and I ask you if you've got any ideas, but neither of us had imagined the photograph yet. Trust is a formal strategy.

As undercover faggots, our erotic actions have to be completed in two parts – without one of these parts there is no relief. The first part has to do with the way we make our world, and the second has to do with the way we move through it. In the domain of photography, our relationship can live as ambiguously as a picture, especially since this picture cannot be claimed as anyone's evidence but instead, a truthful lie. The lie of this photograph helps me hide the truth of this love, so it can be acknowledged and hidden at the same time.

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1. Opening

I once thought I loved someone so much that I wanted to disappear into them. That I longed to disappear was obvious; whether I loved them was a fact that took longer to discern. In the beginning it was all obvious, fresh, wet and red, like a lake or a flower. But our desire lived outside of language, located somewhere more taut and more personal, like the way the rain collected in your hair that night in January when we made out by the gas station on Meeker. The edges hot and bleeding, like a color. There were so many things to touch and feel—hair, skin, teeth, tongues, and everything left a mark somewhere. Then I took to collecting the marks as proof that we were ever here.

Does it even matter that that love failed, or are we more ourselves for having experienced it, and was it inevitable? The light changes. Where it breaks, it breaks completely. The body shows its history. Desire and becoming are inscribed inside and outside the body. To show you I love you, I enter your body. This act takes the shape of a flower.

Here is where the water trembles because it wants to rejoin the sea. And here is where it begins. Look at the edges of the frame. Stay in this place.

– Larissa Pham

Larissa Pham is a writer living in Brooklyn. She is the author of *Fantasian*, a New Lovers novella from Badlands Unlimited.