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KARTIKA REVIEW

MEDITATIONS ON “HOME”



YIYUN LI

Every spring Dad and I planted vegetables in our small garden. Every autumn a fourth-floor granny came before our first harvest, picking up the green beans and the tomatoes while humming to herself. The first time I caught her, I was playing on our balcony. I hid behind a trunk and watched her, not knowing if I should yell out to stop her.

When I told my parents the incident, they said, “That’s all right. She doesn’t have a garden.”

“But she is stealing from us,” I said.

“You can’t be so rude,” they said. “She once sewed a coat for you when you were a baby.”

The next year, the granny came and gathered our vegetables to her basket. I hid behind the window curtain and watched her. My parents had told me not to go out onto the balcony when she was around.

“Don’t embarrass her,” they said. “Think about the coat she sewed for you when you were a baby.”

She came back yet another year. “She cannot come every year to pick up our

vegetable,” I said to Sister Jin. “She cannot do this forever even though she had sewed a coat for me when I was a baby.”

She did not have the chance to do it to us forever. That fall she died of a heart attack, a few days before I turned ten.



Yiyun Li grew up in Beijing and came to the United States in 1996. Her stories and essays have been published in *The New Yorker*, *Best American Short Stories*, *O Henry Prize Stories*, and elsewhere. She has received fellowships and awards from Lannan Foundation and Whiting Foundation. Her debut collection, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, won the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, PEN/Hemingway Award, Guardian First Book Award, and California Book Award for first fiction; it was also shortlisted for Kiriyama Prize and Orange Prize for New Writers. She was selected by *Granta* as one of the 21 Best Young American Novelists under 35. She is a contributing editor to the Brooklyn-based literary magazine, *A Public Space*. She lives in Oakland, California with her husband and their two sons, and teaches at University of California, Davis.