

PARALLEL IS TWIN GROWTH,



UP AND DOWN



By: Cynthia Li

Artwork by: Cynthia Li

Do we think of growth as height,
like young shoots of bamboo that burst
through the soft spring soil,
reaching for fresher air so they can
breathe.

Do we think of growth as rings,
each aged layer of bark hugging the new one
desperately
as new rings sprout into awaiting arms.

I want to sit in your arms and cry.

Cupped hands that push up,
push out,
dripping blood red leaves hanging from the
tree.

Their leaves don't die as they fall;
they stay a vibrant maroon.

My grandpa died at the age of 83 when
I was in 9th grade. He had lived in the
United States on and off following my
and his other grandchildren's birth,
fully residing here after being diagnosed
with a type of blood cancer. He's buried
a little north of the city on a big hill in
a cemetery. When I went back to China
one summer ago, I remember driving
by graves carved into the mountainside,
curved headstones inlaid into the earth.
My grandfather has a Western-style
headstone, a heavy rectangular block.
It has our family name carved into it,
accompanied by a border of bamboo. The
bed he stayed in for months as he got
sicker was by a window overlooking our
backyard. When you're lying in bed and
peek out the window, it's all you see. The
bamboo and the clear blue sky.

Sometimes I wonder if he knew his final
resting place would be in soil he had never
learned the language of. When he spent so
much time in bed watching the bamboo
planted outside sway in the breeze, did he
come to terms with the fact that the cold arid
air, so different from Guangzhou's climate,
was what he would breathe for the rest of his
life?

If his spirit dug far down enough into the core
of the earth,
past red-hot magma,
millions of particles of soil and sand,
so far that the heat let up and the ground felt
moist again,
would he break through the other side
and find himself standing
under the tree at the
steps of his childhood home?

Cynthia Li is a senior studying Studio Art and minoring in BEMT. When she's not holed up in her studio, you can find her at a local hockey game, finding new word games to solve, or reading a book by the pier.