

Terminal One

By: Hayley Lam

Flights to New York from Hong Kong International Airport are always at Terminal One. I think about this as my parents and I linger at the Departure gates. We arrive early every time, and we stand here lingering every time. But if we ignore the inherent awkwardness that comes with standing in silence, there is, in truth, little to say.

I hug my dad first. His grip crushes me, but I let it. When I pull away, I can clearly see the deep-set lines on his face, and the dark circles under his eyes. He goes to bed earlier now that age has caught up to him, but he did stay up late a lot when I was a child. I used to stroll into the living room past my bedtime and announce I was hungry, and he would scramble to heat up a plate of whatever late-night craving he had just gotten delivered. Once, while I ate Hainanese chicken, he delved into a long, winding tale of his life trajectory, full of both silly moments and glory days.

I didn't know it then, but in that story was a young person much like the individual I would become, whose journey and zest for life would mirror my own. I wish I had listened to it more carefully. The old man in front of me now, whose iron grip did not conceal the tiredness in his eyes, is both that person, and also not. I don't know which one I am leaving behind.

I turn to my mom, who squeezes my shoulder. There is a lot being said in that squeeze. Her face is freckled from the sun and holds many lines of her own. Lines that show how much time she spends worrying in this life. She made me a bowl of her homemade dumplings before we set off, even though there are a dozen restaurants at the airport. The summer I had my first internship, she woke up at eight every morning to cook breakfast for me. She would sit across the table as I ate it. I could tell she was savouring the very little time she had with me, and that

knowledge fills me with tenderness. But I never asked whether she had someone who adored her the same way, whose face lit up in her presence, like hers does whenever I walk into a room. My mom's embrace is warm and comforting, and she pats my hair.

I take a few slow steps to the machine, which scans my face, the doors opening. Even though I only ever turn around once I've passed through, I know my parents will wait until I do. There is a lot of waiting to do when you're a parent, I have learned. Waiting for your children to find their way in the world, waiting for them to come home, waiting for them to turn around. There is love in the waiting, and it has sustained me my whole life. It is everywhere. In the lines on my mom's face, and the dumplings she so carefully wraps. In the way my dad jolts awake in his chair when I come home at three in the morning, and insists he wasn't



tired and thought I might have forgotten my keys. And it is in the way they linger at the Departure gates. Never speaking, never being first to break the silence. In shoulder squeezes and hugs that are too tight.

One day it may be my turn to stand where they are now, and wave goodbye to someone I love more than the world itself. To watch them walk away into a life I cannot follow.

I walk to security screening, but before I pass through, I turn around and wave. Their silhouettes are small, but I can still make out their expressions. I wonder what they see. I spend the majority of my time away from them, and it occurs to me then that, upon my return each time, they must have had at least one moment when they saw me for the first time in months and felt surprised, even foreign. A young woman that speaks in a language they don't understand very well, who lives in a country they have seen and know very little of. But still a baby. Their baby. One day it may be my turn to stand where they are now, and wave goodbye to someone I love more than the world itself. To watch them walk away into a life I cannot follow.

I will keep leaving, and they will keep waiting, and in that silence is where love lives. Not despite the leaving, but through it. Because of it.

I wave again. My dad catches my eye first, and my mom's head pops up beside him, and she waves too. She is smiling. The summer before I moved to New York, she had cried at this very spot inside the terminal. My dad is a typical men-don't-cry macho man, but he had cried too. Yet they still came the next time, and the next, just to say goodbye to me all over again. And it will happen again and again, even after I graduate college. I will keep leaving, and they will keep waiting, and in that silence is where love lives. Not despite the leaving, but through it. Because of it. I turn the corner, and my parents disappear from sight.



Hayley is a senior majoring in Psychology. She has been writing for Generasian since her first semester at NYU, and this will be her final contribution. This piece is dedicated to everyone who has ever read or written for the magazine. And of course, to her parents, who inspired this piece, encouraged her dreams, and are always waiting to welcome her home.