

# Perspective

Sofía Zhang-Jiang

University of British Columbia

## Perspective

The room was small and sparsely furnished, the walls a pale mint color. It gave off a feeling of cleanliness and emptiness.

I gazed at the ceiling from where I lay motionless in bed. The mint walls stared back blankly. It was early morning of a warm spring day, but my blanket felt too thin.

I continued to stare in silence, my gaze projecting my circle of muddled thoughts onto the ceiling. There it was again, the image of Jared that haunted me day and night. Jared reading off his law school acceptance letter, smirking at me. Jared telling me I could never get in. My rejection letters sitting unopened in my inbox. Jared telling me we should stop seeing each other because he was moving on. My brother Austin landing a big internship—at age 19—a week after my rejections. My parents bragging about him to the neighbors. Me sitting quietly, drowning in a sea of disappointment, wanting to blend into the wall while building my own walls higher and higher. Nobody could hear me scream.

*Why can't I be smart like them?*

*Why am I never good enough?*

*Why are everyone else's journeys so smooth while mine has boulders one after another?*

A tornado was gathering incoherent thoughts and whipping across all the space my mind had. I felt too tired to sleep. My mouth was oddly parched, but the water jug was placed on the table out of arm's reach. *Maybe someone will come check on me. Would I like that?*

I lay like so, my thoughts echoing off the mint walls. I was content to stay there until the walls collapsed.

A knock came. With it, a blur of long hair, a purple dress, and a white coat appeared. She pulled the chair next to my bed and sat down, resting her hand on the edge of my blanket. I shrunk away automatically.

“How are you feeling today?”

I didn't want to speak.

I glanced at her name tag. Dr. Carmen Sui-Tian.

My gaze shifted behind her left shoulder. The blinds on the window were closed, but slivers of light peeked through chipped corners of the slats illuminating the sole painting hanging on the opposite wall. It was medium-sized, about the same width as the door. My first impression was, what a sea of depressing blue. Varying shades of blue were overlapped one on top of another in broad, careless strokes that grew darker from center outwards. On the left was a mass of black

rectangular shadows, ominous in their multitude. I could just make out a figure in the swirl of blue on the bottom right hurrying away, a blood red scarf around his neck billowing behind him. I felt a strange connection to the painting—a connection I didn't want.

The doctor turned her head to follow my gaze.

“All the rooms here have a different painting like that. They are all actually old art works done by previous patients in this unit. You know, there's an art therapy class here in the afternoons.”

I stared at the painting for a second longer. It seemed to me that the figure was trying to break free from the suffocating towers of life.

\* \* \*

I poured a glass of water, nodding as Austin chatted next to me about his intention to try baking for the first time tonight. Wrinkling my nose, I turned away and pulled off the blanket to fold. We both looked up upon hearing a gentle knock on the door. Dr. Sui-Tian poked her head in. She had come to check on me before I left her world and went back to my reality.

She greeted me with a smile. “So, all packed up and ready to go?”

I nodded.

It came to me that I liked Dr. Sui-Tian. She exuded calmness that put me at ease. Her soft, bright aura, not garish in any way, seemed to absorb rather than deflect. We chatted about my treatment plan as my brother headed out to carry my bag to the car. As the door swung shut, my eyes shifted to the painting that hung next to it.

“I think I miss home,” I said. I wanted to look at something other than that damned blue painting.

“You'll be there soon.”

When Dr. Sui-Tian left, I took one last glance at the mint walls, bare save for the painting. Suddenly, the misshapen structures in the background held a new meaning. *The figure is escaping from the confines of the psychiatric ward back to the adventures of his normal life.*

I nodded slowly.

Maybe the layered shades of blue represented a clearing sky.

I walked closer to the painting, tilting my head to inspect the uneven brush strokes that stood out from the canvas. My eyes were unexpectedly drawn to the bottom right corner where a tiny white scribble was visible—a stark contrast to the predominant dark colors. I could just make out the name, written in a slanted cursive.

Carmen Sui-Tian.