

“Of course I live in a house, where else am I supposed to live? On the streets?” she chuckles.

Tendrils of cigarette smoke slither around us. Crossing a silent street, an apartment looms over lumps of red brick and chicken droppings sprawling across the ground. Murky, gray water oozes from an entrance, the ascending stairs fading into black. Sheets of paint peel off dusty windows, trying to escape. Dying lights flicker above moldy balconies. Tiny white bumps erupt from my skin as a cold breeze shoves the summer air aside; Jia Jia’s pudgy hand grips mine, pulling me towards the building. She stops. My stomach gurgles. My grandmother squeezes my hand. No p

The girl peers at me.

"Hi," she says.

"Daiyu, show her your English textbook." Mrs. Chen whispers.

Daiyu pushes the green book towards me. The words "*Sarah is at the beach*" sit under a picture of a little girl playing with sand.

"Read it to her." Daiyu's mom urges.

"I can't read it well." Daiyu giggles.

I leer at Jia Jia, my eyeballs flicking upwards.

"Just read it," I say.

Daiyu takes a deep breath, "Saarah is at zee bitch," she musters.

I blink a few more times. Daiyu stares at me. A giggle crawls out of my mouth and Daiyu's lips curve up. Forcing a smile, Mrs. Chen [eyes] Daiyu and walks to the kitchen. Daiyu peers at her mom disappear behind yellow walls and closes the book, the pages slapping against the cover.

"Wanna see my tadpoles?" Daiyu whispers.

"Uh, okay."

Skipping to the bathroom, Daiyu swings open the door and snatches a plastic cup from a moldy shelf. Orange crust clings to the bottom of the container. Inside, little black tadpoles dart in murky water, bumping against the cup and sloshing the green-black liquid. Our fingers prod the little swimmers as they shoot away, leaving us with chuckles.

Lissa: How's China?

Me: I'm mindblown. It's disgusting and tiny!! My IXCT

