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cho bà nội (for my grandmother)

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newton said that energy is neither
created nor destroyed. in her favorite
restaurant, i can still hear my grandmother
gossiping with the waitresses □ she used to
come so often, they fed her free of charge □
electricity sparking in her eyes; in her old
apartment, i can hear her slippers
shuffling to the kitchen □ my mother bit her
lip to refrain from scolding her □ and the
tapping of finger pads against ceramic mugs; in
the hospital, i hear her rustling in her paper

gown □ even in her prolonged exhaustion, she
never cared for the hospital robes much □ and
scoffing at the forest of needles embedded in her
forearm. when i listen to the wind, i can still hear the
symphonies of a thousand years playing her to sleep.

Julia Vu is a pansexual Vietnamese American high school junior from Bay Area, California. She is the Editor-In-Chef of the literary magazine Café Au Lait Magazine and works to amplify the voice of the underrepresented. Julia founded Operation Dopamine, an international mental health advocacy organization, and has worked with ambassadors from 9 countries to stimulate discussion around mental health. As an IB Diploma student, she is actively conducting individual research on nivolumab-ipilimumab combination immunotherapy in metastatic melanoma. A survivor of depression and eating disorders, she documents her cycles with decline, relapse, and recovery through her poetry. Her works have been published in the anthologies Songs of Peace: World's Biggest Anthology of Contemporary Poetry 2020 and A Celebration of Poets 2020, as well as various literary magazines. Julia hopes to empower others and embrace the beauty of her own mental illness by sharing the letters she never intended to send.