

## CYNTHIA YAU IS EXQUISITE

by ZZ Claybourne

The Bimaiy sent artists. Trillions of them forcing themselves out from the fissures and pores of the reality substrate into moist, spongy biospace, riding the drenching rain directly above Cynthia Yau's head which caught the young woman unprepared as she dashed from the awning of Berknett Hotel, then through the hot parking lot, and angrily into her car.

She slammed the vehicle's door, drenched, pissed, and breathing heavily. She started the car, looked at herself in the mirror as rivulets escaped her hair, and sat, wondering if she could possibly grip the wheel any harder.

The Bimaiy, microscopic empaths of unrelenting sensitivity and grace, layered Cynthia from head to toe, passing through boring layers of inert yet colorful woven fibers to the highly active canvas of flesh beneath. They settled like a fine, invisible mist into her skin, spreading outward to ride her bloodstream, crowd around her mind and, like any good artist, become part of the art. Like the lightest, most gentle of touches, she had no idea they were there.

A few Bimaiy had experienced humans before, but never at a depth as this magnificent group's undertaking. Even the temperature variances of the living canvas proved positively intoxicating. Parts of its face warmed and reddened as though angry fires flared directly beneath, other bits of the corporeal shell cooled and contracted as the moisture plastered the garments—inert material which obscured so much of the canvas's beauty—to the skin; the Bimaiy had no idea why any meatspacer would bother with such primitive art.

As the Bimaiy flowed over and through her, the subject reached out and powerfully turned a knob amidst a row of inert protuberances arrayed in front of her. A massive and sudden flow of

air blasted the damp, enclosed space. “Jesus fuck, that’s cold!” the subject exclaimed. The Bimaiy didn’t know “Jesus fuck” but the emotion with which this random meatspacer expressed the outburst marked it as a deeply personal song.

A contingent of religious devotees blessed this song.

The canvas quickly reversed the same inert bit, commanding the flow of air to lessen.

“That’s the last fucking time I meet anybody at a fucking hotel in this fucking city.”

The Bimaiy exulted. This meat contained symphonies of fucks. The canvas looked at the reflection of itself again. “You know who’s not giving any more fucks?” It pointed at itself. “She isn’t.”

Naming things was the first art. *She*.

A vibration startled their new, still fragile, connection with the canvas. She pulled a sleek rectangle from her back pocket and stabbed it till it came alive with various colors and shapes.

She studied one of the patterns on the screen. The Bimaiy studied with her. It looked like this: *HOW DID THE DATE GO???*

This pattern immediately caused her to stab the rectangle again. While She swiped at the, emotionless artifact saying “Delete, delete, delete” with mounting glee at each repetition, her guests used the time to explore her autonomic systems and other inner workings. She was marvelous. The harmonies were wildly complex; fluids not only circulated but self-regulated themselves, led by the rhythmic percussion of a compact bit of meat beneath one of the twin protuberances capped by the pointed, craggy sculptures that had previously contracted to stiff points but were even now relaxing and flattening.

She tasted like a nebula to them.

Of course, as artists, the Bimaiy were ever observant. Their canvas muttered again about fucks and they were delirious that She “only had so many fucks to give.” She’s entire essence swelled with emotion each time She did so; the Bimaiy truly wished every meatspacer in this dimension had many fucks to give, although the possibility that She was a savant of their species could not be dismissed.

Finally, She allowed her idling conveyance to move out, and even that produced art: the gravitational press, the changing visual stimuli producing various fleeting moods.

The rectangle chimed at her. She stabbed it, spoke to it: “Jen, I’m driving. I hate men, I’ll call you later”, and stabbed it back to darkness, glancing downward to drop it out of sight into a convenient compartment. At this point, a conveyance similar to She’s exhibited its prowess by wildly darting across She’s path, leading to an expression of “Fuck!” so elevated as to generate a separate genre of musical aptitude entirely. The colors accompanying the emotions were divine. Reds, coruscating oranges, flurries of many-hued blues, and the blackest, blackest black ever experienced in the brief history of the Bimaiy, who counted their civilization at less than two epiphanies old.

There were appendages involved in the exchange as well. This species communicated verbally and physically, appendage usage appearing to be particularly important.

“Fucking Tindah,” She said, her body emitting a dark, bleak fuck. A low note extended toward infinity fuck. It slowed the Bimaiy’s activity among She’s body. They felt like the drops of meat moisture they’d ridden down into this space; solitary, lonely, commingled without pleasure. Wastes.

This was not the best fuck for them to experience, but also no denying there was an appeal to its deathly timbre.

The rain outside stopped. A bright, hot sun came out. She lowered a pane of glass, allowing a fresh breeze to enter as She turned off the conveyance's flow of cold air.

Droplets now and then fell from the meatspacer's long, dense cranial follicles. As the sun's light struck the drops, fractalized prismatic landscapes revealed themselves to the Bimaiy, absolutely awed by this stroke of genius. Light from a star far, far, far away...used as the fulcrum of artistic expression? With this kind of depth and precision?

The conveyance exited the company of all other conveyances, coming to a stop beneath one of the planet's tall, leafy elders. Immediately, a large blat hit the large pane of glass directly in front of her. "Seriously?" said the subject. "Seriously, you're gonna shit on my car? I fucking hate birds." Several of the tapered, aerodynamic bits of meat flitted within the tree's upper reaches, trilling repetitive notes in desperate attempts to stay artistically relevant.

With the window down, a sharp buzz shot by her ear and into the vehicle. It was one of this planet's tiny, passionate dancers.

"Holy fuck!"

She sprang out of the conveyance, arms creating rapid wind patterns and spirals. The dancer followed her.

"Jesus fuck!"

Glorious.

A spinning "Fucking hornet!" capped it off.

It was a rapturous offering of fucks that told the Bimaiy that this canvas was much more superior to previous art canvases on this plane.

It deserved more than appreciation. It deserved participation.

The Bimaiy broadcast the desire for more dancers to engage with She. Several responded.

“Sweet fuck of Christ!” She sprinted around and around the car.

The Bimaiy suffused themselves in this beauty.

She snatched open the conveyance’s door on the next pass and quickly reentered, willing the clear pane hurriedly back to its task of denying the planet’s exterior unfettered access.

Several buzzing dancers continued to perform outside the small pane. Some even moved to the large pane above the splat.

This...was sublime.

The Bimaiy waited.

The conveyance moved forward, rejoining the dizzying collective of conveyances.

“Fuck. Me.”

There it was.

A new fuck.

Meatspace was proving to be fascinating.

\*

“I’ve been having a fucking terrible day,” She told the inert rectangle. “Last week he kept asking am I into lingerie, so I figure I’ll wear my good stuff. I get there...he’s into lingerie.” She took in a deep breath. “It’s not called ‘Matchstick’, it’s Tindah, and I haven’t had my licorice whipped since—no, that’s not disgusting; listen, I would be paleontologist-boning him right now if—no, I don’t care what he wore. Listen, I saw his phone wallpaper. A little baby. I say I didn’t know he had a cute kid. He says ‘No, that’s me. Ain’t I adorable?’ ” During her pause, the Bimaiy ran the entire gamut of fucks with her, experiencing the intensity of the art She created in an almost euphoric state. “I’m tired of weird shit in my life, Jen. My job sucks, you live a thousand miles away, nobody gives a fuck about the Mandela Effect, and the cinematic qualities

of porn still suck! Am I asking too much to just wanna fuck a dude and not want to vaporize him afterward?” Another pause, this time longer. While She paced, She created arias within; fluids rushed, bubbled, gurgled, syncopated with hot flashes, backed by erratic improvisations in her apex meat’s electrical output.

It reminded the Bimaiy of riding the fluvial auroras of less explored areas of the Great Substrate.

Another spike in temperature, then, “You’re my closest sorority sister, my best friend, and the bitch who stole Otis Lucas from me, so you should be a lot more supportive. Oh, then a bird deuced right at my face on the windshield and hornets chased me. How. Has. Your. Day. Been. Jennifer Naponse?”

More silence from She. The dead rectangle was part of this art but the Bimaiy couldn’t fathom its exact contribution outside of clearly influencing She’s galvanic, autonomic, and creative responses.

Not all art was meant to be understood.

The dead rectangle served as a connector. That was sufficient explanation for now.

“No, I’m not going to pour myself a thermos of wine,” said She, retrieving an oddly-shaped usage of silicate from another dimension, one wherein the ambient temperature differed wildly from the enclosure in which She performed. She transferred liquid from the pocket universe item to another artifact, then upended the second artifact to form a seal with She’s large communicative hole. “That’s the sound of me hydrating. Eight glasses. Health. Oh, plus I got drenched, so even more hydration. Yes, I’m naked. Yes, all my blinds are drawn; I haven’t forgotten about the church perv across the street. Tell me about that ugly boyfriend of yours again. Is he still absolutely adorable?” Another pause. Lengthy one. Very lengthy one.

She stood still. She listened. Nothing happened.

Then the Bimaiy understood: the absence of art was part of the art. In building anticipation and curiosity, the lulls made the Bimaiy part of the experience rather than mere observers.

She, they realized, was meta. This sent another thrill through them. *What would She become?*

Their great joy spoke again. “Sorry to hear about that. Am I going out again? As if I fucking know,” She said. They’d felt her building to this crescendo; having hit it they felt kinship with She. So much so, they decided to extend their stay.

The Bimaiy were extremely long-lived.

Thus, now so was She.



When she’d reached her one hundred-thirtieth year and still looked thirty-two, she was tired. Tired of being interviewed, studied, sought after, propositioned, threatened (church nut neighbor; not the same one, new one, new era)—but she didn’t know how she had become the world’s oldest (and greatest, as far as her secret Bimaiy benefactors were concerned) living piece of art without deterioration.

By then the Bimaiy had learned pronouns plus a lot more of her native language, enough to know the “fucks” **they** felt her emanate were actually called “emotions.” And that “She” was Cynthia Yau (“Ms. Yau, can we get a picture? Ms. Yau, what’s your secret? Cynthia, cyber Oprah would simply die if she could get you on her worldfeed...”)

At thirty-seven she’d almost gotten married, except for her fiancé, Ashford, finally verifying for his own sanity that her skin, at times, literally crawled. Not all of it, just tiny sections when she slept or was in deep concentration. Freaked him the entire fuck out. Since she was the model

of health, he didn't mention it to her in case it was some minor, embarrassing thing she didn't care to talk about.

Jennifer had met him once during a vacation stay after a bad breakup, guessed he wouldn't stay for the long haul. The Bimaiy hadn't liked Ashford either. They had quickly learned what he was from Jennifer. He was *basic*.

His art created no bridges. But Jennifer...Jennifer intrigued them as much as Cynthia had.

And knowing Jennifer was deeply connected to Cynthia, a contingent of Bimaiy migrated to Jennifer to try to understand how their dynamic worked.

Both women burst with colors, especially when they communicated with each other.

Those led to grand movements along Bimaiy art history.

Even their underarm follicles captivated. The Bimaiy loved the unique geometries and textures the "hair" formed whenever either woman was too busy to scrape it off, taking that love so far as to make the follicles wave into the most minute fashions...which always led to those upper arm grottos being shaved and inspected, enough to send both women to doctors several times, the many puzzled physicians never understanding how their body hair could be styled so intricately while they lay sleeping at night.

By the time Cynthia hit five hundred, she'd seen everything worth seeing in the world. She'd bedded generations of actors, actresses, models, political figures, a Dalai Lama in 2112—quite publicly—and roadies from all the best bands. She'd studied science, and then sciences she hadn't even known existed, and then made up some of her own.

Jennifer had been by her side, her life extended by her own colony of Bimaiy.

Racists—social programs having almost expunged them from the common zeitgeist by the time she and Jennifer hit two hundred—were apoplectic that a Chinese and an Ojibwe woman,

whose only connection was they'd met in college, were now effectively the only immortals on record in the scientific history of the entire world. For how could anyone appreciate the symbiotic beauty of the Bimaiy's art appreciation rejuvenating their subject's cells on a microbial level so long as the colonies of artists moved through their hosts' bodies?

The Reichmanenuffs (as Jennifer had called them) hated the fact that Cynthia and Jennifer had "kicked their asses" on more than one occasion. The Bimaiy's favorite expressions of art had not only become the only immortals but superheroines, too, because what else was the microscopic race going to do? Allow their precious canvases get damaged when scientists or asshole men had tried to see just how impervious these women were to injury?

Of course not. Instead, the Bimaiy weaved their microscopic filaments tighter around the women, and they in turn became stronger, fought back; they learned how to use their newly-impervious skin and greater strength to liberate those more vulnerable.

The art shaped from those actions, from the intensity of a rescue, had the Bimaiy enraptured. They giddily binged through seasons of surprise, fear, resignation, acceptance, and exploration, never feeling a need to branch outward to other human canvases. Cynthia and Jennifer's passionate natures created the most beautiful art they'd ever experienced: art that expressed itself differently in cold climates, high altitudes or when it was scared shitless by large, mutated sharks. Over time, the women grew much less reliant on things either woman had ever thought they needed, and more on watching sunsets, eating fish tacos, and developing a lightweight impervious biosuit.

They talked about everything. They shared everything.

One day their talk centered around an asteroid.

It was coming.

They couldn't stop it. They'd told people that.

It was the first thing the news feeds glommed on to: What Were The Super Women Going To Do?

Turned out not a hell of a lot. The asteroid was the size of Utah.

"It's a piece of Krypton," Cynthia'd quipped after an interviewer thrust his presence in her face during her yearly pilgrimage to K'wai Beach to be alone.

This sent the world into paroxysms of great art. The Superman *S* was worn as a sign of defiance or resignation depending on how someone's day went.

Krypton, as the asteroid came to be known, was coming, and no amount of bombing, rocket attaching, praying or fiercely communal sex magick was going to stop it.

The closer the huge hunk of nickel got, the more people beseeched the Earth's only immortals. Not for world saving stuff. Marriage ceremonies. Escape ship dedications. Monument consecrations. Artificial actions all; Cynthia and Jennifer were the art people needed to live a daily life.

Krypton presented the human race with the slowest death scene ever: thirteen years before impact.

Plenty of time to screw and have kids.

People being people, they did.

In the last days before it was to hit, the Kryptonians (as the last generation became known) gathered at Yau Mall of Peace, millions of newly-minted teens and tweens from around the world, some with their parents, some—lots—part of the Feral Contingent abandoned by suddenly nihilistic parents. They sat on the great mall...and they sang. *The Hymn to Yau*. A song a hundred years their senior, but they nonetheless sang it with such feeling and Zen despair that

Cynthia, flying slow, mournful circles above them with her jetpack, cried so much the kids reached upward hoping to get hit with a tear.

The Bimaiy likened this to the brightest sunset they'd ever experienced. They'd learned to love sunsets; Cynthia often sat to watch them. The disappearing sun made her feel like it was just her undying self and the world. Her sandy buttpoints around the world became revered sites.

Bimaiy sects within her devoted themselves to nothing but focusing on the highly ephemeral art of blue giving way to orange, giving way to umber, giving way to purples, then darker blue, then none. The sky was gone for the day, and with it a piece of Cynthia's sadness.

It was her sadness that made the art most beautiful, why the Bimaiy were still so bonded to the beauty she created with her emotions. She stood atop Jen's sky tower and looked out after the sunset had faded, the saddest one ever. The world scrambled below.

What did any of it mean?

Everyone else she once knew was dead. Sure, Jennifer was her friend, but she'd never thought she'd witness the death of the Earth with her. Especially not after living a thousand years. But this was it: Super Cyn couldn't do a thing no matter how much money she had or how much tech surrounded her. Even Super Jen couldn't do anything, and Super Jen—per every tabloid's historical records of her—could do *anything*. Such had been her tenacity in years' passed.

As Jen joined her to watch the fruitless panic below, the Bimaiy, sensing something, but unsure whether to trust their perceptions, waited as well.

The first precept of Bimaiy: One didn't rush art.

The second: One didn't consume art, one became it.

“This has been wild, yeah, Cyn? We're superheroes, scientists, and EuroVision models.”

“And yet, we still don’t have any of this figured out.”

“I think...sometimes there are lightning strikes, right? Precise ones that do amazing things.

We’re those,” said Jennifer.

“When’d you stop wondering ‘why us’?”

“Honest answer or Super Jen answer?”

“Honest.”

“Just now,” said Jennifer.

“I never stopped,” said Cynthia.

“But are you cool with who you are?” Rockets continued to blast skyward across the vast swath of the horizon.

“I’m good.” *Except for the weight of the world being on my shoulders.*

Jen considered her for a long moment, taking Cynthia’s hand. “All those people out there running and losing their shit aren’t yours to rescue.” The private space fleets left roiling plumes expanding in the painted sky like brushstrokes on overly-absorbent canvas, all the edges spreading slowly, fascinatingly outward. “You’ve done some wonderful things.”

Cynthia’s gaze remained fixed on the rocketship exodus but she gave a small nod. Those ships were based on Yau-tech engines.

“You gonna follow ’em?” asked Jen. “Be an immortal among the stars?”

“Eventually. What do you think, it’ll take about three hundred years to clean this place up with the survivors?”

“Probably.”

“Y’know, it just hit me we could’ve called ourselves ‘Lightning Strikes’. It struck twice.”

Jen shrugged. “Chalk it up to superhero inexperience.”

“By the time we head out to the stars we’ll have cool names. Maybe we’ll just be adjectives, kind of transcendent. You? ‘Magnificent’,” said Cynthia with warmth.

“I can work with that. You, only one word will work for you—”

“I love you, Jen.”

“Cynthia Yau is ‘Exquisite’.”

And the Bimaiy went wild. Their art had finally recognized their worth.

Cynthia Yau. Exquisite. Whole and badass.

As the women watched the cotton plumes expand, The Bimaiy, in silent agreement, realized their contingent could now move on. Art was potential. Art was in the creation of. It was tension. *What could something become?* was the core of Bimaiy philosophy. It was time to understand new art, but, *oh!*, what a magnificent goodbye: *I love you, Jen. Cynthia Yau is exquisite.* The emotions which swirled within those short exclamations celebrated every potentiality the Bimaiy could possibly have hoped to create, leaving them with a supreme feeling of peace.

The most treasured art of Earth wouldn’t know the Bimaiy had left them, not yet.

It didn’t matter. The masterpiece was finally complete.