

Fourteen Hills

THE SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY REVIEW

No. 28

2022

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Fourteen Hills Press
San Francisco

A very special thanks to the following individuals, whose efforts made this issue of *Fourteen Hills* possible: Jane George; Nona Caspers; Chet Wiener; and Nicole Baxter, Devin Koch, and the team at Bookmobile.

Cover artwork: “Dolabela Engineer” by Guilherme Bergamini.
Typesetting, book design, and cover design by James Giffin.

ISBN: 978-1-889292-83-0

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Printed by Bookmobile, Inc. in the USA.



BOOKMOBILE
CRAFT DIGITAL

Published annually by Fourteen Hills Press.
San Francisco State University / Dept. of Creative Writing
1600 Holloway Ave. / San Francisco, CA 94132
www.14hills.net



Distributed by Small Press Distribution.
1341 Seventh St. / Berkeley, CA 94710
www.spdbooks.org



Individual subscriptions: one year for \$16 or two years for \$32. Back issues are \$5 each.

Submissions: the submission period runs from February 15th to June 15th. All submissions are electronic. Details at www.14hills.net.

Erratum: in our previous issue, we misspelled the title of Turandot Shayegan’s poem “Taxes & God.” At *Fourteen Hills*, we understand that such differences, however small, can change the reader’s perception of a work and sincerely apologize for our error.

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BLIND SPOTS

Amber Wong



When I offered myself up as the token minority, I rolled my eyes and thought, “*Somebody’s* got to do it.” In August 2020, the idea of having an all-white diversity committee at our Seattle rowing club bordered on satire: too earnest, too oxymoronic to be taken seriously. To be honest, I’d laughed when I first heard about it. Then I felt sheepish. Then I volunteered.

Sitting in my home office, in the lull before the other three committee members joined our weekly Zoom call, I chatted with the young guy leading the committee. We’re a generation apart but found something in common: he currently works for the federal government. Before my retirement ten years ago, I did too.

Knowing that his agency, with oversight over mine, was traditionally a wary adversary, I broached what I hoped was a benign topic. “So is your agency unionized?” I asked. That had been a huge human resources headache facing the Environmental Protection Agency management team as I was leaving government. Some job classifications were being unionized while others were not. As managers, we wondered how we could treat everyone equitably if the union imposed certain conditions on dealing with “their” people.

“Yes,” he said matter-of-factly, as if it had always been that way. “Why?”

I started to explain that unionizing the professional staff had once been controversial. “Well, when I was a manager at the EPA, we were trying to figure out how that would work. You see—”

He broke in, “Oh? You were a manager?”

Thwap. I felt my eyes narrow while the rest of my body flinched. Why was he surprised? Had he just reframed me as the enemy, a symbol of the historic distrust between unions and management? Or maybe he was thinking, “Ah, this explains her bossy attitude.” Or worse: he may be revealing a deep implicit bias—he didn’t envision Asian Americans, especially women, in management. Was it our well-documented lack of representation—he’d never seen a female Asian American manager before? Had he bought into the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans as hard workers with