

AMY M. LAM

---

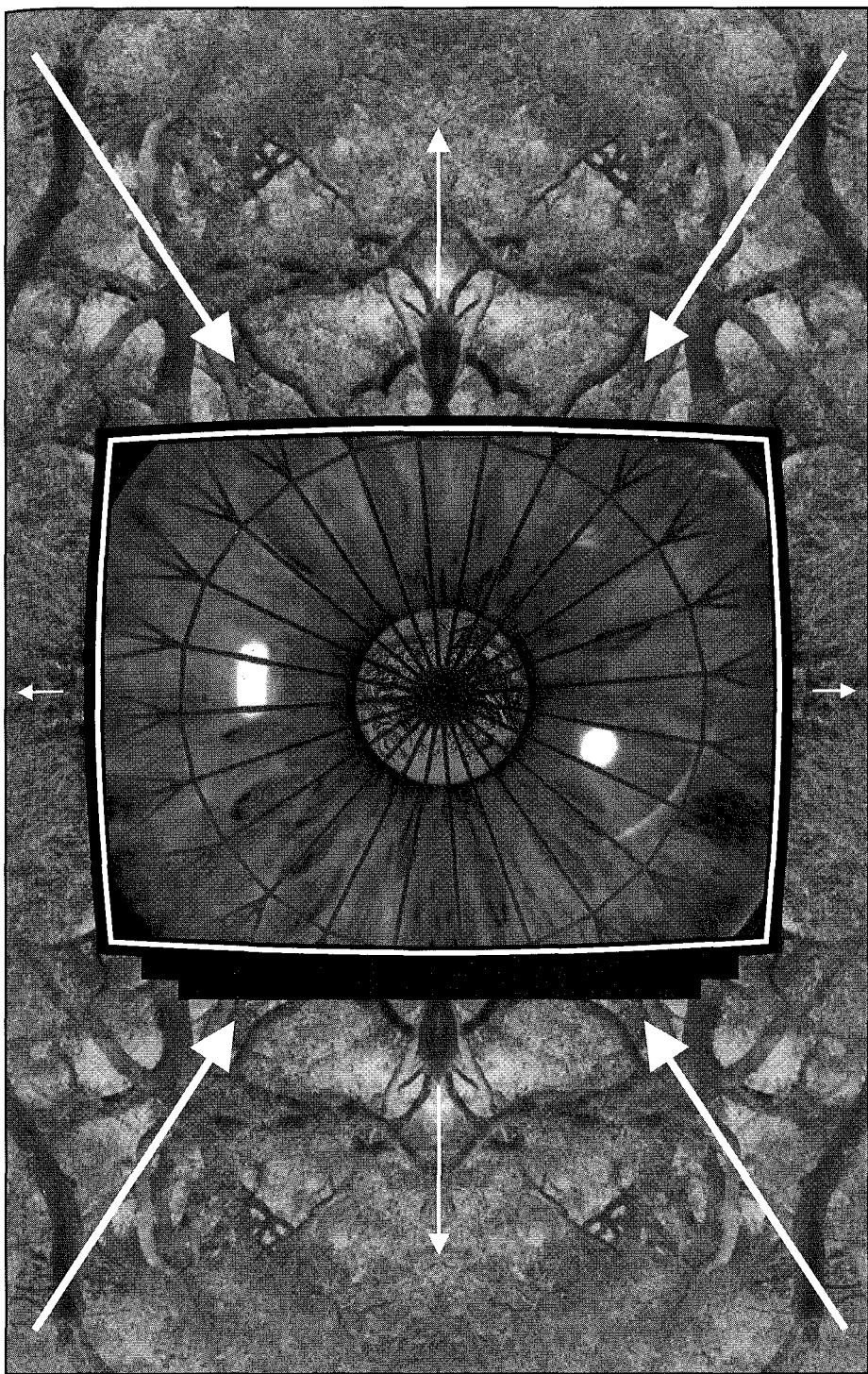
# SCRAPED

**H**E ASKED ME IF I WANTED A “SCRAPED.” DELUSIONS OF MY hipness drained out of me. I thought I knew most of the slang my junior high kids were using but this was a new one. Did he just ask if I wanted to have sex? I turned to look at him. He was looking at me oddly with his arms up in front of his chest. Why was he looking at me like that? I looked down at myself. I had assumed the same pose. I must have unconsciously taken the “neutral/defensive, possibly offensive” stance I learned in self-defense class. The instructors said our combative learning will ingrain itself into something called muscle memory. I guess it worked.

He asked if I was okay. He dropped his arms to his sides. His demeanor showed me that he had no mal-intentions. With my arms still up I asked what a “scraped” was. He said that it was a shaved-ice treat, like snowcones. He pointed to the brown man coming toward us pushing a cart with a huge hunk of ice and syrup in dispenser bottles on it. The bells strung onto the handles jingled. He said his kids tell him that in Spanish this treat translates verbatim into English as “scraped.” I let down my guard, and my arms. I have seen these carts before in front of the school. I just never suspected such a question from him, today being his first day at work. I told him I would like one and we walked, sucking on sugar coated ice, to the adjacent teachers’ parking lot.

Yeah, that was a strange day. I sat at my desk, grading assignments. I was frustrated with the number of incorrect answers. Perhaps it wasn’t just the students’ fault. After all, I put off making the assignment until two a.m. the night before. I just didn’t feel like doing it any earlier. There could have been some ambiguous questions. Well, teachers have lives too.

Then I got caught up in watching John. He came out of his apartment downstairs. I turned back to my stack of papers. The penmanship on some of those!





But before I could even pick up where I left off, John came back. And then he was out again. I was distracted. A bad thing. But then maybe a good thing. I wanted it. A distraction.

Distraction is like diversion. In Spanish, they call diversion entertainment. So I was entertained by John. I watch him come and go. I watch him like a cat from my window. I am fascinated. He's tall, and I never suspected that he's balding. He walks as if sighing continuously but without the exaggerated chest movements. I couldn't help spying on him all afternoon. His apartment extruded him, sucked him in, expelled him, inhaled him. I was finally bored around six that evening.

On television, Phil, the liberal devil's advocate, was grilling underage young women about having anal sex with their boyfriends. One woman even confessed that she worries that she might be pregnant and might have an anal baby. Where does he get these people? But I am riveted. Only during commercials do I allow myself to take my ritualistic sojourns to the freezer. Now this is when the cheese falls out and breaks my toe. Well, it's been so hot this summer I even stopped wearing underwear. The elastic choked off my thighs into sausages, and I couldn't bear looking at them and fight off the heat at the same time. I could blame it on my mother. She's been feeding me cheese all my life. Cheese she gets from the government. Why does the government give out cheese? Mom still gets in line for the cheese even though she's been lactose intolerant for years. "It's mine," she says. "The government isn't going, to give me anything else so I'm getting what's mine." Well, what's hers is a distinct essence. You should see her freezer. It's loaded with cheese — all kinds. It's from her that I learned to store cheese in the freezer. Only I never expected the cheese to be a weapon.

So, I was at the emergency room for three hours last night. I wasn't a priority, they said. Finally, they looked at my foot, took X-rays, and told me that it'll heal itself. I waited all that time for nothing. They wouldn't even give me pain killers, because, they said, my broken toe didn't hurt. Can you believe that?

This is why, Mrs. Brown, I can't come in to work today. Would you call the sub desk?