

Mint Dirge

by [Karen An-Hwei Lee](#) in the [March 2023](#) issue

After the winter, we long for an aromatic caress of mint,
for the sprig of new mint on a bathroom sill, the tingle
of the soft mint starlight over the blue mint of the sea—
drowned acres of blurred mint under the ocean waves,
watery yards of spearmint and winter mint and catmint,
butter mint and basil mint crushed and brewed in tea bags.
This is how we shall live from now on, days after the war,
grace-filled and simple as a populace without wheat bread
or the daily rations of butter and flour. We are a solo leaf
shrilling an aria in a cup of tea, a pickled scent of peril,
the lichen souls of ragged breath clotted by spring mud—
mint green's everlasting signature prevails. The wind asks,
who is invading whom, why? It is not the sea, the Black Sea,
nor the bundles of mint that we lift and weigh at the market.
The war does not care about poets or their little peppermints
for throat-clearing with glasses of water at their readings.
The war does not love the spring mud or the wind erosion
on the steppes. It does not see the charred bundles of mint
at open-air market where a grenade exploded. This war
does not sip tea and chew the leaves so children can eat.
It is a warped spoon left in the street, run over by tanks,
a moldering sack of mint tea abandoned by the railway,
a blasted room where ravenous dogs uproot the dead.