

Quinquagenarian

by [Karen An-Hwei Lee](#) in the [January 2025](#) issue

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The month I turned fifty, I ate pear and violets,
a milk-soaked custard cake. On the waterfront,
a lesser egret devoured her supper, fishy slivers
of finning light out of the bay where the river
mingles with the sea. I drifted far as the market
where lavender soap wedded to dewy beeswax
melted in the winter rain, making the smallest
they'd ever been since their days of lye and ash.
How ruthless we were when young, the rushed
days sweeping lovely eelgrass on the shoreline,
soles pounding all the way to the wrecking surf
and back. I stood with the gravity of a blue heron
on a good leg at low tide, grateful for the hour.
She feels things stirring where no one else sees
the beaver moon, so-called because of the season
when they start hibernating in their reedy homes
during the last full moon of the winter solstice.
I'm fifty years old. Even learned a word for it,
a quinquagenarian. Here's an anthem for this:
a hard frost, the wick-wick of marshland reeds,
a nerve singing in a molar underneath a crown
thanks to inflammation, my stiff right shoulder,
moods, impulses, and hooks that will rip a soul
now mercifully abating with the receding tide
while our memories pass through like weather.
The love of Christ isn't dished out to sinners
on spoons but shed abroad by the Holy Spirit.
And I wonder, once upon a time, if I could tell
my younger self, it's all right—you'll grow hair
down to your waist. No one will say anything.

You will compose all this in a poem one day.
A woman named Edith who lives north of you
on the little peninsula, a holocaust survivor
who danced for her life in the death camps
twice your age, one century in years, says,
May we have peace in how we have lived
And how we intend to live.