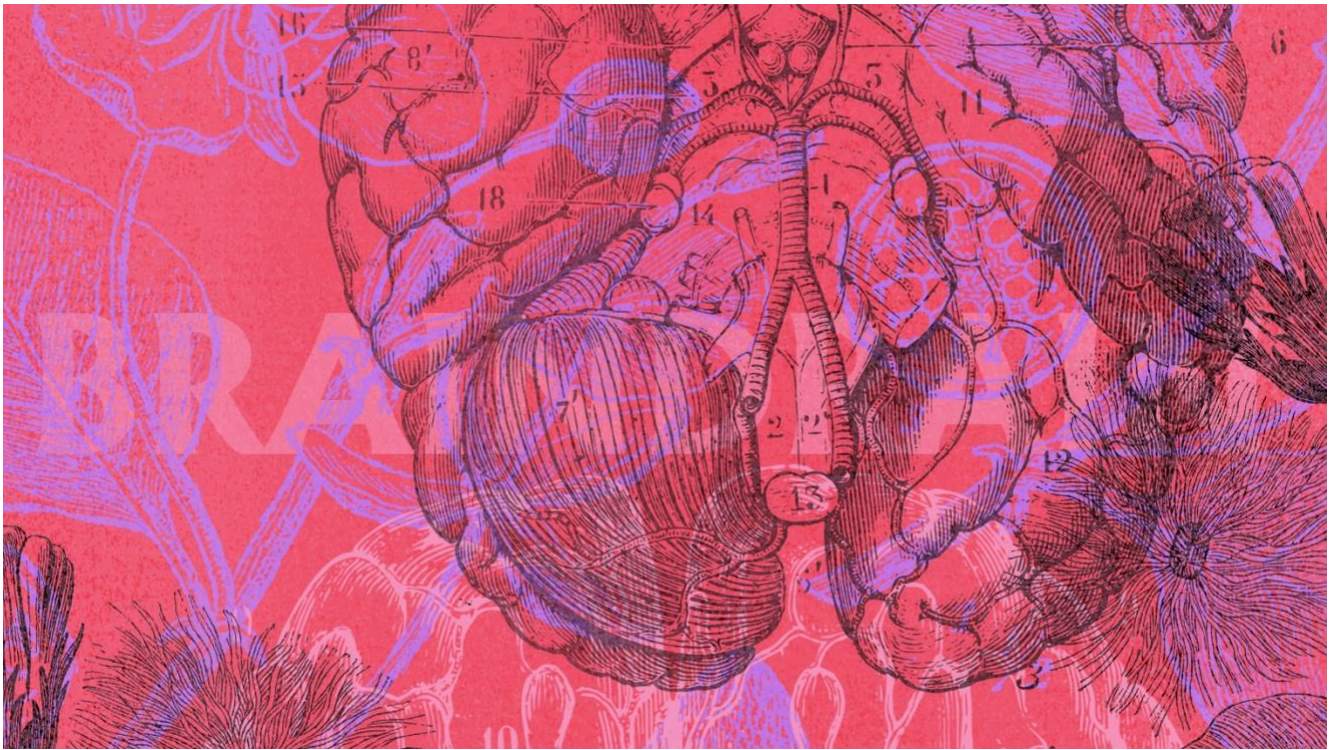




[Brainrain](#) by C. Pam Zhang – Winner of Paper Darts 2<sup>nd</sup> Micro Fiction Award

Because bodies couldn't cross the borders—bodies were unwanted. Bodies had disease and sweat and threatening biceps and strange-tongued languages, needed beds and jobs and maybe even women and lives, meant a future of preexisting bodies diluted by the sweat-flesh-stink-color of new bodies. No bodies. But what was okay, they said (they on the right side of the wall), was brains.

Tossed over, slipped through cracks too narrow for shoulders, bobbing across seas like coconuts, came the brains. At first border-residents complained of cerebral goo, which left a troubling smell of stale tears. A severe proclamation was issued. Thereafter, all brains were carefully wiped before being thrown, flown, slid, shipped, given.

Wondrous things arose from the brains. Congratulations and medals were handed around, one suited man on a podium to another. Because without bodies—their distracting skins, breasts, eyes, tongues—the ingenuity of brains could be fully harnessed for the first time. Within the walls, technology thrived. Money hummed.

Without, families sat around the bodies of loved ones. Hugged the slumped shoulders, bathed the hollow heads. Pressed the slack fingers to phones to authorize digital payments trickling in. No thanks exchanged. What was the point? The brains dwelled elsewhere.

C Pam Zhang's debut novel, *How Much of These Hills Is Gold*, is forthcoming from Riverhead Books. Her short fiction is in or coming to Gulf Coast, Kenyon Review, The Missouri Review, Tin House Open Bar, and elsewhere. She's not quite sure where home is, but lives on Twitter [@cpamzhang](#).