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# CU

## Writing in English

Volume IV / 2004



# **CU Writing in English**

**Volume IV/2004**

## Editing These Short Stories

Editing is *Discovery*; editors are *Gemini*.

It is our great pleasure to be the editors as we have experienced having *Two Faces* when we are editing our own stories. While we are editing others' stories, we also endeavor to get involved in *Another World*, feeling what the writers feel, seeing what the writers see, experiencing what the writers experience.

During editing, which is actually a *Process of Initiation*, we all explore these truths about short stories.

Short stories are the plants seeded by the experiences of reading *Story of Cinderella* or writing *Diary of a hero* when we were children.

Short stories are not only *Flowers in the Vase*, but with immense imagination and creativity, they are also the *Caprice* that enables the writers to express their feelings towards life.

Short stories can be inspired by the most trivial details in our life: *The Red Plastic Bags in my Grandmum's Bed*, *My Family Physiognomist*, *I Hawker*, *we Hawkers*.

Short stories are the transformation of these details and become glamorous, splendid and sparkling *Bubbles*, hoping to enrich readers' lives.

A short story writer is our *Hero* as his or her work sharpens and refines our worldview and feeling.

We are going to face our *Graduation*, but from the editing work, we found that CU Writing in English is only the *Beginning of the End* of our life of creative writing. We sincerely hope that all the contributors can carry on writing short stories and dedicate more to the world of literature.

Erica Chan Ying Shan

Hester Chan Lai Man

Barbie Lau Wing Yee

Ruby Yong Wai Ting

## Editing These Poems

To many people, poetry is more difficult than solving riddles: it can take a few days to understand just a few lines. But this is the beauty of poetry.

Being the editors of this collection of poems, we enjoy reading and choosing from the works of our classmates although sometimes we find it hard to grasp some of the meanings presented in these intelligently crafted productions. In our editing work, we show our appreciation of the originality of the authors. But we still make necessary changes related to grammar, structure and diction in light of the thematic importance of their works. We feel proud of being able to share with you these reflective poems. They are the fruit of our hard work in a Creative Writing course, in which we experiment with different forms of poetry like villanelle, limericks, cantos and 10-line sonnets before we come to our own productions.

Last December, it was our honour to have a chance to perform our works at a meeting of OUTLOUD, a local poets' circle. We shared our compositions as well as our inspirations with the audience. It was a memorable evening. We got braver, and more adventurous; we were emboldened to parachute into the art of poetry.

On behalf of the poetry editorial board and all the budding poets in the Creative Writing course, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to our fellow classmates, our Department Head Professor David Parker, our teachers Miss Jamila Ismail and Professor Louise Ho, Miss Tracy Liang and the English Department. We would not have been able to create this collection without their tireless effort, ongoing guidance, and devoted assistance.

We hope that you enjoy the poems offered in this collection, which mean so much to all of us.

Vanessa Chan Wan Yin

Janice Leung Tsz Man

Connie Or Ching Hung

Phoenix Yuen Siu Fung

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# The Beginning of the End

Andreas KAMBERG

Only minutes remain of my life. Maybe twenty if I struggle, or just a few if I welcome death as instructed. Bound by my actions, and the leather straps of the chair, I will never again arise. Soon the hydrogen cyanide will pervert the air, snatch my consciousness from my final exhalation and deprive me of my existence. Their God of ink will be honoured, and isolation restored. Their justice will be served.

\* \* \*

Helios, the God of the light, emerged with his chariot from the east, and cast his blessings and curses over the awakening earth. Some believed in him, not many now, but he was always there for all to see. A constant factor. Honest in his creation, and destruction, not claiming to hold the answer to all things. The concealing cloak of darkness withdrew, and revealed the land to his piercing eyes. Embracing the flora, encouraging the fauna, refilling the batteries of nature. The vale was overflowing with the sound of life, dressed in the garment of change. The waves of leaves travelled along the forest floor, red, brown and yellow, the colours of departure. Merging with the rich soil of the past, reuniting with its kin, preparing to enclothe the forest anew come spring. Three infant mice came stumbling out of their hole, captivated by the warmth radiating from above. Beside them the remains of a squirrel decayed, to the convenience of the larvas seeking nourishment there. From the leaking roof of the forest a blackbird frequently plunged down to feed, on the feeders. Life ceased, and life commenced, in the micro cosmos of the land. The cycle of renewal prevailed. All things pulsating with the same energy. Connecting the end of one cycle, with the beginning of a new.

I parted the curtains and introduced the dark room to his transparent rays. The thick air became alive with glowing particles, hovering in the mass of oxygen, reflecting the intensity of the sunrise. Invisible without illumination, but ever present, just out of sight. His message was the same as always when I greeted him. Starting his journey anew, every morning. Offering white papers, and crayons in all colours of the rainbows for choosing.

This morning was different. My paper was stained. With the dark, thick fluid of life. Besmirched with the taint of black. Gun powder.

The ravens were still alert, circling above the house from which the irregular noise had emerged. The stench of fear had been strong; a predator had awoken. The ravens did not cry out for

explanations, nor a justification beyond their own realm. Merely announced the revival of a bond, a part of the totality, and let the listening world know that the right of the strong had been claimed.

A new howling wind came rushing from the edge of the forest. Following the path of the long grey stone which ate the land. The wind had changed. Once they had played the same game, companions of all times. The rules had changed. The new wind surrounded the ravens, overpowering their ability to manoeuvre, limiting their movement, forcing them to follow its path, or be destroyed. The ravens did not want to leave the forest of change, but acknowledged the power of the wind, and surrendered to its will. In the mercy of a power they were a part of, but did not belong to.

\* \* \*

My trial was swift. The rites were well established, and the participants skilled in the execution of the ceremony. I elevated myself above the well decorated scene, and watched them as they covered their heads with the hair of dead white horses, to emphasise the seriousness of the occasion. They would preserve their ways, restore their order and honour their books of conduct. An offering would be made.

They urged me to lay my hand on their most sacred of books. As if their God was inside and the power of the written word would compel me. I swore, and their god would help me, so they said. How distant they were. Wanting to believe that the curtain would once again arise, after their last line was recited. And they would spend eternity in the clouds, celebrating their significance. Allowing themselves to be numbed by the prospect of their encore, distancing themselves from the earth, to which their bodies were bound. Merely noticing life as it passed, merely wanting to make it through their journeys within the regulations of their game. Blind for nature's structures and balance. Deaf to the maternal voice, deep inside and all around beings.

The young man, my designated advocate, told a story I could not recognize. His black woollen suit, exclaiming a foul fragrance emulating nature, and his equally black leather shoes made him inseparable from the other actors. His appearance designed to communicate all the skills and qualities he needed to possess, made me count the deaths of the animals used in the manufacturing, the children working in the factories, and the caged animals, bred as raw materials. Their books did not mention them.

'My client is not guilty by reason of insanity,' he argued. 'As a result of a severe mental



defect, he was unable to appreciate the nature and quality or the wrongfulness of his acts,' he continued automatically.

He spoke a language I mostly did not understand, they all did, as if planned for my deception. A severe mental defect? Insane, I? Coming from a man with horse hair on his head, unaware of his own insignificance, trapped within the confines of his own illusion, I felt ashamed.

'You should touch their book too,' I encouraged him.

He looked at me, seemingly surprised by my participation, before continuing with his performance. For a brief moment I wanted to tell them the story of the wind, arousing the leaves of a shielding tree, and brushing against the window. Tell them all about Helios' arrows flickering repeatedly in my eyes, mocking me, and human naivety. Inviting me to challenge them. To control my own faith. How the thickness of the air was crackling with anticipation, only protruded by the distant song of a blackbird, answering the call of its nature, followed by the disturbance of the ravens.

His opponent narrated a different story, repeatedly awakening me with his bursts of fury, pointing his finger in my direction. The two stories had the same foundation, though differing greatly. But neither of them mentioned the sun, the flickering of light, the larvas, not even the forest of life. And soon, the old man with the hammer would decide which story he favoured the most. Just a formality. Then the offering could commence.

'The evidence will show,' he said to the dynamically organized people situated to the right of me, 'that the defendant, shot. And killed. The two innocent women, in their own home. And here he sits before you, showing, not the slightest sign of regret. Like an animal.'

They all looked at me for a while, as if to verify his statement. I did not move as their eyes examined me, judging my visual appearance. My effortless posture did not display the appearance taught to communicate honesty and integrity. My body did not speak the language of social conditioning. The prosecutor raised his voice anew, still claiming me to be insane. And then the old man above asked me if I had anything to add, before they would pass judgement.

'I have nothing to add,' I said. 'But I have something to say. I am after all the main character.' Nobody replied. I could hear some whispering from the back rows, anticipation. A man

in the front row lowered his eyebrows, awaiting my valedictory, and the old man with the hammer bent over his desk, disapprovingly, as if I was disturbing the order of the rituals.

‘If there is a god, or a creature superior to you,’ I proposed with a clear voice, ‘why is it given that he should love you, and cherish you, any more than you love and protect the creatures you rule?’ I did not wait, nor expect an answer. The shockwave of blasphemy shot through the room, and left the listeners unbalanced for a brief moment, before their egos were automatically restored, not even considering what I had said. My question buffered against their established order.

‘Why are you satisfied with being told what to do in every aspect of your lives, never questioning the foundation of your values, never considering the fact that your believed meanings in life are the exact same things that a society needs from you: produce, consume and reproduce, and don’t ask any questions. Blind to the natural life ever present in front of you. The truths and gestalt of nature. The unity shared by all things bound by gravity, and beyond. All present within, around and below. But invisible in the fog of elevated human significance, numbing your minds, cutting you off from our origin. Like the connotations hidden in the darkness of axioms, and the automatic reactions to idioms, contaminating your ability to reflect, distancing you from yourself, and life. Making you deaf to the voice of Gaia. The voice deep inside your being, telling you instinctively what to do, how to act and react. The lucidness of the natural order, corrupted by society’s conditioning, and the power of the written word. To the point where no one remembers the foundation and origin of their writing, but still worship the writings as if they possessed the powers of which they tell.’

I paused and looked around as I regained my breath. Their faces were silent and motionless.

‘What legitimates you to judge my actions? The definition of right and wrong as written in your book? Based on the belief in a god, and a universal truth, an unquestionable definition of good and evil? Are you the keepers and minions of paper with ink? The words written by people in power, conquered by wars and bloodshed. They knew what was right and wrong? Or is it the word of your god that gives you authority?’ My voice recoiled against the brown wooden walls. ‘Your god does not exist to me, nor to most of you, and you still let your articulated moral be based on a fairytale. If there is such a presence as a universal right and wrong, a natural order, it lies within the harmony of the nature you work so hard to deny.’ Some of the people in the front row moved uneasily, looking impatiently at the old man with the hammer.

‘How long has it been since you walked on the earth?’ I shouted. ‘And not the stone mass you so diligently cover the face of the earth with.’ I rose to my feet, stretching out my neck and captured their eyes in turn. ‘I am not a sheep.’ I proclaimed to the world of humans, the wind, and the ravens above. ‘I killed the women to be free.’

The silence was broken, and the spectators were exchanging furious words, shouting at me and at each other. I continued in a lower voice. ‘I killed the human animals to break away from the codes. The norms and regulations, controlling your thoughts, beliefs and actions into your most intimate biosphere. You have no power over me now. You are below men who determine their own faith. Without the need to justify their actions and the harmonious logic. You can execute me in the name of what you wish, but you cannot legitimize it with anything but the power of your reactive majority.’

\* \* \*

A spider is spinning his web in the top left corner of my glass box. Slowly constructing his deadly trap, unaware of the forthcoming death. How many victims has he ensnared? Filling the purpose of his existence, following his nature, claiming the right of a hunter. I will not die alone.

The previously empty seats outside my tomb are now filled with spectators, eagerly awaiting the fulfilment of the story. My exit. They are all here to watch me die. Watch the power of death, many for the first time. I am degraded by my entrapment.

The sound of capsules breaking the surface of water behind me releases a wave of terror in my body, and I know the deadly gas will fill the room within seconds. So soon, they did not even wait until all the spectators were seated, I have not decided what to do, what to say, what not to say. Should I beg their god for forgiveness, just in case? Should I utter a sentence that will haunt them the rest of their lives, or open their eyes to their inferiority, explain everything to them? Would they let me out if I begged for forgiveness and vowed to honour their book? Helplessness is closing in on me, threatening to strangle me before the gas introduces itself to my lungs. I am a caged animal. My nature cannot be tolerated within their artificial sphere. There is now room for my harmony. Their semantics encompass and isolate them, their books lend them authority and, and their hermeneutics justify their mandate. I am the sacrifice, on the altar of the signs. To please their God of ink. But when they self-destruct, the eternity of nature will prevail.

A single arrow of light shoots through a window beside me, only visible to me in the corner

of my right eye, spearing the room. Releasing all the colours of this world as it transcends the confinement of the glass walls surrounding me. The colours of beginning, the colours of change and the colours of departure, all playing in front of me, filling me with joy and the feeling of belonging. The air is again alive, illuminating the particles floating in front of me. Every pore of my body longs to reunite with the colours and the light.

I am a part of a complete universe, an insignificant part of the unlimited harmony, but a part which constitutes totality, son to be illuminated.

I take a deep breath.

# Juvenile Delinquency

Phoenix YUEN Siu Fung

The childish youngsters' schoolbags drop to fight.  
They call the senior brothers; act like blind.  
They beat then bleed to step on roads not bright.  
Their parents urge them they should do things right.  
Teachers warn they shouldn't to ruffians bind.  
The childish youngsters' schoolbags drop to fight.  
Still sleep in school time and combat at night.  
They change to cruds of hoodlum, they don't mind.  
They beat then bleed to step on roads not bright.  
A battle with knives, not fists, in their sight  
Is to show to foes they need not be kind.  
The childish youngsters' schoolbags drop to fight.  
But a gun is used while knives are too light  
To use to make a scene where corpses are lined.  
They beat then bleed to step on roads not bright.  
As they're killed by new gangsters in a plight,  
New pride tramples old corpses parents can't find.  
The childish youngsters' schoolbags drop to fight.  
They beat then bleed to step on roads not bright.

## Petal Beauty

Phoenix YUEN Siu Fung

A petal can't resist the wind,  
Falls, remote soil where it withers.  
A frosted remnant, under cruel foot quivers,  
Floats to make hoarse gloomy flutes.  
Armed leaves drop to pacify brutes of winter  
As they decay in fertile ground.  
A petal's kept fresh by its foreign collector.

“He is no good! Cheater!! All *gwei lo*<sup>1</sup> are big cheaters!! Never talk about him in this house! Never!!?” Granny’s eyes kept glancing at mum when she spoke in a hasty voice. Mum’s eyes did not leave her documents. It was like she didn’t hear anything at all.

“Mum...?” my voice trembled as I pulled the sleeve of my mother’s shirt lightly. Mum...?” She worked as a manager in Morgan Stanley - the kind of job people admire. She was the kind of iron lady who kicked real butts. I admired her, but her coldness was intimidating. Mum...? Erm...Everyone is having... mum and dad...together...on parents’ day...” When I lowered my head my voice got lower too. “I...I...I want...Daddy...Daddy...to come...”

“I said don’t ask! Don’t bother your mum!! Come here! Come!” Granny started to yell and pull my arm. Mum remained silent. She just looked at me, patted me on my head and gave me a strange smile. I knew Mum wanted me to leave the room with Granny. I knew Mum did not want to talk about “him” - I didn’t even know his name. I remembered once Mum was not at home, and Granny told me, as a top secret, that Dad left Mum when he knew she got pregnant. Sometimes I wondered, did my mum really love me? Or did she hate me for ruining her life completely? She seldom looked happy.

“Your mum works very hard! Earn money for you!” Granny lowered her voice and asked me not to make Mum sad, and immediately after that she raised her voice again. “Come here! Do revision!” That’s Granny’s all-time favorite tactic to change the subject of conversation. “Ooooh, yes! Your Chinese dictation! How was it?”

“65...” My voice was hardly audible and my fingers couldn’t stop fidgeting with the hem of my t-shirt.

“What?! Only 65?” How come!?! You got 95 last night! I did the dictation with you so many times!” Granny pulled my ear so hard that it really hurt. But I didn’t dare to make a sound. I just continued to let her growling shake the house. “Did so many times and you still got only 65?! Useless! Now go! Turn off the TV! Come do more revision! Useless! If you get less than 80, no TV for 1 week! You have everything! How come you are so lazy?!” I walked to my desk silently, and looked nowhere else than my book...

\* \* \*

“Bonita!”

I startle with my Granny’s voice echoing in my ears. Did I really have everything? I doubt it... I started to doubt it when I was just a good-at-nothing kid. Granny died 5 years ago when I was 21, and 2 years later Mom left me to join her. It has been so many years now, so many lonely years that I shared with no one but myself, trying to find out what is missing in my life. But I still haven’t found the answer. Did I... really have everything?

“Bonita!!!” I glance up and my head drops immediately when I see that glowing red face.

“Where is the file I needed 2 hours ago?” Oh damn! I didn’t realize my boss was standing in front of me! Did he see me doze off?

“Erm... Mr Lee... erm... I’m... still working on it... Please give me...” I search the desk for the document. I can’t bear to look at his eyes shooting fire at me.

“Give me... give me... give you what?! Tomorrow I will let you be the king!! OK? Do it now! And bring it to my office!” He storms away but brakes midway to his office. “And, IF I catch you slacking again you are fired! Hear me?! I really don’t know how your soul can fly out of your body so easily!! Are you jinxed by some kind of psychic in Thailand or are you possessed by a ghost???”

\* \* \*

“Mom told me, she is half ghost<sup>2</sup>, half human!! Very scary! Run!” All the four-year-olds started to flee - some boys roared with laughter, some girls screamed and some others giggled. Just like the cartoons I watched on TV, they all ran away with spinning legs.

I stood there unmoved with my chin sticking to my chest, waiting for my kindergarten teacher to rescue me from this hell. My yellow uniform looked so nice on the tiny me. It matched my perfect brown ringlets that no one else had.

\* \* \*



“Hey I like your ringlets, love.” What a typical cheesy pick-up line from a typical bar fly. “You are a bonnie doll. You know those wee dolls with very long eye lashes and very big eyes and beautiful ringlets? When you lie the doll down it closes its eyes?” He speaks with a Scottish accent. He has a cute face with shades of stubbles and his chest hair is prominently sticking out from the collar of his shirt.

“Haha! I know what you are talking about.” All I need is to look into his eyes and I know what he is after. All the men here in Lan Kwai Fong are after the same thing when they see me wearing these wonder bras under the saffron dress. Wonder bras are definitely one of the most influential inventions in the world. “I love those dolls,” I rest my cheek on my hand and give him a killing smile. I know he will love it.

“Did anyone tell you that you are really... gorgeous?” He says in a dreamy voice. I don’t say anything but smile and look into his green eyes. He leans forward a little bit. “Hey... Do you wanta go to the bar in Ritz Calton and have some nice Scotch whisky?”

Suddenly I wonder, did my mom and dad hook up in the same way and create me, purely as an accident?

\* \* \*

“Hey do you know she has no dad? She is a dirty wild child<sup>3</sup>!”

The things that my classmates said behind my back were always loud enough for me to hear them clearly.

“Yes! I think she was born from a stone! With an explosion! Haha!”

“No! Her mother must be a prostitute. My mom said only prostitutes would have wild children. You know her mom did not get married before she was born! I saw her many times she really had no ring on her finger!”

I had no way to fight back. I was never good at anything, except keeping my eyes fixed on the ground, unfocused. The bravest thing I did to them was to yell a single “Stop” with a tremble in my voice. “S... s... s... stop!”

“See? She can’t even scream properly! What a chicken!”

“Her mother is always very quiet! Just like her, so chicken!”

“Yeah they are both chickens! Her mother is a chicken<sup>4</sup>, sold her body and got a wild child, and she is a chicken who sucks at everything! Like mother like daughter!”

\* \* \*

I always wished I could be more like my mother - strong, independent, and beautiful. Maybe I am like my father. He sounds a perfect coward. How could he leave my mother because of me? I always think that I somehow ruined my mother’s life. If it wasn’t for me she wouldn’t be looked down at by other people. And if it wasn’t for me she wouldn’t have to work herself so hard to narcotize herself of the pain from all the rumors and scandals.

“Hey Bonita, have you read the papers today about Jackie Chan’s wild child?” Judy comes into the pantry with her cup. I am having my lunchbox alone as always. She is my boss’s favorite employee. She has big breasts and everyone says that my boss is having an affair with her. All men love big breasts.

“Arh... No... I... I... I haven’t... read the papers... I... have been... busy...” Why the hell does she want to talk about it? She can’t know anything about my father, I hope? I pick up my lunchbox and start washing it in the sink, scrubbing it more thoroughly than I usually do. I don’t want to see her eyes questioning me.

“Don’t tell me you don’t know about it! It’s shaking the whole of Hong Kong! Everyone’s talking about it!?”

“I... I don’t know... I... I don’t read... the Chinese papers? I can feel the stare behind my head, it stings.

“Oh yes you read the SCMP, don’t you? Hey but you can read and write Chinese, can’t you?”

\* \* \*

“What? Change school? Did you say change school?”

“WHAT? You don’t want to study Chinese? No way! You are Chinese! How can you not learn Chinese?!”

“WHAT? Speak louder! What? Only half Chinese? How dare you! You have no ghost blood! NOT EVEN A TINY DROP! How dare you say this! How dare you!”

“WHAT? Your mom won’t let you go to an international school! No need to ask her!”

“What? Say louder!! Speak like a mosquito, who can hear you?! NO! I said no already! No need to ask your mom! I said no, she will say no, too!”

\* \* \*

“Can I stay here tonight, my sugar?” He is lying beside me with his arm around my shoulder, touching it gently with his fingers, and the other hand holding a cigarette. I rest my head on his hairless chest, listening to his heartbeat. “I’ll drive you to work tomorrow morning if you make me breakfast.” He kisses my forehead. I love his perfect Queen’s accent.

“Nope!” I sit up and stare at him - into his mysterious grey eyes. “You have a family. Your wife will get angry if you stay here.” You can never look through those grey eyes. They mist over the owner’s heart.

“Oh I don’t care about her anymore! For you and for you only will I get my lawyer to arrange a divorce!”

“No. It will make no difference. You can’t stay here no matter what you do.”

“Hey, why? Why are there so many no’s? Oh darling! Com’ on! And I don’t understand! I don’t understand why you never let me stay over! And I don’t understand why you never let me take off your bras! Don’t you think that is ridiculous?”

I can feel my eyebrows twitching. “I have my rules. If you don’t like my rules you can just walk away. I don’t give a damn!” I leave him alone in bed in a cloud of smoke, with an additional

cloud of questions and confusions. And I... I drown myself in the faintly hot lavender bath with a sea of overwhelmed thoughts...

Why don't I let anyone take off my bras...? Not even for the intimate moments? Why?

\* \* \*

"Hello miss, is there anything I can help you with?"

"Erm... I am just looking around, thanks."

"Miss, have you tried these new bras? They are called wonder bras. See the pads here? Here, yes, these ones. They are not made of sponge, you see? You can touch it and feel it. Yes, it's water inside. It just feels so real, can you feel it?"

It felt so strange to touch it. I never knew how it felt to have big soft spongy breasts, but I thought it was just like that ?watery soft, felt like jelly wrapped in a silky packet.

"Miss, why don't you try them on?? You can feel the difference. Just try them on and look into the mirror and you will know what I mean." She giggled. "I will get you some different styles and you can see which one you like best. I guarantee, once you try them on you won't want to take them off. They are addictive!" She giggled again.

I walked into the fitting room and locked myself inside that tiny space with a full-length mirror in front of me. I took off my clothes, and looked at myself. I never liked looking at myself. I tried on the wonder bras, the breast-providers. I couldn't help wowing. The salesgirl was right. Wonder bras were really wonderful. They didn't only boost your bust, but they boosted your every thing! I started to enjoy looking at myself. "Miss, do you like those? Here, here, over the door, take this silk nightgown and you can see how you are transformed!" I took the dress, slipped it over my body. The dress was a black low-cut and it was the first time I was in something "sexy" and actually saw my breasts popping out! This must be listed as the eighth Wonder of the World!

"Thank you very much! You see? They are addictive! I am sure you will come back again!" The salesgirl giggled when I paid for the wonder bras ?I ended up spending half a month's salary on the bras and the other half on sexy dresses that I never had the courage to wear.

\* \* \*

“Bonita, we are going shopping today after work. You know it’s getting cooler next week. So I thought we could go shopping together for some warmer clothes?” Judy suggests. Her skirt is so short that can barely cover her hips. Her XS shirt is buttoned up to her busts and her naturally stunning breasts can hardly wait to come out of the shirt and breathe freely. She definitely needs some “warmer clothes” to wear.

“Tiffany, Crystal and Tina are all coming. You have to join us! I’ve never gone out with you have I?” Her hands keep moving and her breasts jump. All of a sudden I feel like I am one of those horny middle-aged men staring at women’s boobs with a bleeding nose – it’s definitely too much excitement.

“Hmmm... er... sorry... I don’t think I can go... I have...”

“Don’t tell me you have things to do! Hey come with us! I can be your stylist! You know whether a woman is attractive or not all depends on the clothes and make-up she wears!! You will look different with some new clothes! By then you won’t have to hide in the corner any more!?” I don’t get what she means. But I am sure she is not being friendly at all. “No... er... I... I promised my friends... for dinner... Sorry...I can’t join you” I just make up an excuse to get away from her - how can she not realize that I never enjoy talking to her?

“Oh, well, up to you.” I see her butt wobbling away from me, and I feel relaxed. How can she bully me like that? She doesn’t know I look really wonderful once I have my wonder bras on. She doesn’t know me. No one knows me.

\* \* \*

“Have we met before? You look familiar.” Oh shoot! Is he that sexy Scottish guy I met in the pub? How can it be? He can’t recognize me! I am not wearing wonder bras and I don’t look as wonderful as the time he met me. At this moment I am just an ordinary OL5 wearing boring black suits walking on the street with an undone face with my eyes fixed on the ground!

“Hey love, I forgot to ask for your name and number last time! You left in such a haste!” I don’t want to stop and respond to him. I don’t even want to look at him. I don’t know how to deal

with this! I don't like him stepping into this life of mine. I don't want to know him. I don't want him to know me either. Not this "me". Not now.

"Hey, love? Are you alright? Am I... Hey! Hey!"

I keep walking faster and faster, hoping to get away from him. I have never wanted to go home so badly. I don't want to deal with this. I don't want to see anyone. I don't want to hear anything. I don't want to see anything.

I get home half running and forget to buy take-away dinner for tonight. I stare into the mirror on the dressing table through the steam coming out from the cup noodles. I see myself blinking. But I don't see my soul in my eyes. I see a blank face staring back at me - worthless, defenseless.

I am lost in my blank thoughts until someone knocks on the door with a jumpy rhythm. I never had any visitors, except the one night stands I brought back from pubs, and... Thomas. Thomas is one of my boyfriends, who is an Englishman with an English wife and 3 lovely blonde English kids - I envy their clearly defined ethnicity while I am partly Chinese and partly don't-know-what. I look through the peephole and there he is, waving at me with a silly smile on his face enlarged by the fish-eye lens. But... He should be reading stories to his kids at home right now... What is he doing here?

"Hi, darling!" He dances through the door once I open it. "Oh, darling! You won't know how much I missed you when I wasn't with you, my sugar!" He grabs me by the waist, lifts me from the ground and whirls me like the ceiling fan.

"What wind could blow you here at this time, my dear?" I am really puzzled. He is so different today. Something must have happened. "And what makes you so happy? You never liked dancing!"

"Hey sugar, look - at - this!" He kneels down on one knee, taking up the classic proposing posture. "Da-da!" He holds out a thin pile of paper with one hand holding the top and the other holding the bottom. "She - signed - the paper!"

"What?!" I take the papers and I am transfixed. "S... se... separation... a... agreement?"

“YUP!” He jumps up and starts dancing again, speaking with a singing tone.” And - she - signed - it! She - signed - it! She - signed - it! And I did it just - for - you, my sweet - heart!”

My feet are pinned onto the floor. I feel like my thoughts are sucked away and my energy level drops past the trough. I watch him dance, and stand here unmoved. And surprisingly, my heart is unmoved as well.

“Aren’t you happy, baby?? I did it for you! And I - did - it! Haha! I am soooo happy!!”

...

Should I... be happy?

Or... is it a maze... that I can never get out of...?

<sup>1</sup> Cantonese speaking people usually use gwei lo to refer to westerner(s) in general, meaning “ghost man(men)”.

<sup>2</sup> Ghost, translation of gwei in Cantonese, is a colloquial form referring to westerner(s).

<sup>3</sup> Illegitimate child

<sup>4</sup> Chicken in Cantonese is a colloquial expression referring to prostitute(s)

<sup>5</sup> Office Lady

## Five. New York

Julia GROENNEVET

we're walking around  
in the middle of some sort of exhibit  
on tropical plants,  
me and mom and david and dad,  
around where the nbc thing tells you the news in red, scrolling type.  
as we stopped for something,  
the ordinary-looking man standing near me  
suddenly drew his long hair away from his face  
and held it in a ponytail  
before dunking his entire head under the murky water  
in a tank  
holding some half-aquatic plant.  
then he surfaced again and,  
with eyes closed,  
wiped his hands carefully across his face  
which had a beatific, half-asleep, relieved  
and graceful expression.



# Extravaganza

Vanessa CHAN Wan Yin

Anywhere, anytime, she drinks, she swings.  
Like peacock, hovers, the balls we attend.  
The fertile mother changelings drops like kings.

No one thinks she is an ugly duckling-  
Sapphire eyes, slender waist, fetish of men.  
Anywhere, anytime, she drinks, she swings.

Not a single man ever gives her rings  
In dawns, as by-products of one-night stand.  
The fertile mother changelings drops like kings.

Hail Mary is not the song she sings.  
Motherhood, a word she can't understand.  
Anywhere, anytime, she drinks, she swings.

Bother not how many children she brings,  
Mother children never go hand in hand  
The fertile mother changelings drops like kings.

Lust, passion, fantasy, fervor, yearnings,  
Extravaganza in life never end.  
Anywhere, anytime, she drinks, she swings.  
The fertile mother changelings drops like kings.

# Graduation

TAM Ming Kwan

It was a cool day. The heat of early summer was washed away by a heavy downpour. Tramping on the streams of rainwater, we headed towards Memory. I was told by a classmate of the existence of the bar. At that time, going to a bar was a trendy and adult thing to do. So we decided, actually I proposed, we should have our first drink in it. In such a floating world, darkness, endless darkness was the only element that reigned, like looking through the smoky prism of time, nothing really existed, nothing for you to anchor on. We ordered a mixed drink in red that didn't contain alcohol. It was named after a movie, but I can't remember exactly which one now. All I can remember is the bar guy who kept pouring colorful juices from grotesque bottles into the cup. The juice in one of the bottles was red, like tomato sauce- for a moment I really believed it was-which gave the drink its color. On top of it, there was a big deep-red strawberry, which gave an impression of ripeness. But it was sour, like the rest of the drink.

That was four years ago. Now we were heading towards the same place, under the same wet weather, to have our first beer. It was part of the revelry we planned before the release of examination results. The "we" were Jane and I, not Tarzan. The content of "we" had remained unchanged for the past seven years since we first met in Form One. I had urged Jane repeatedly to change her damn name so that I wouldn't be mocked as Tarzan. But she didn't yield to me like she did on some other matters. Of course, it was not totally her fault. Sometimes, I thought Tarzan suited me. Jane thought so too. She always said those girlish names didn't suit my tomboy style at all.

When we finally got into the bar, there were only a handful of customers, probably, because of the rain or the fact that it was too early. The life of those secretive nocturnal animals- as Jane called them- was beyond our understanding. The ambiance remained the same- the same darkness, the same void.

"Cheers! For our graduation and success in the exam!" Jane toasted when the beers arrived.

"Cheers! Goodbye, dull uniforms. Do you believe that, I don't have to see that witch every

day! I used to think I could never break away from her!” “Witch” was my class master. I used to be an easy prey for her to pick at.

“I bet she’s now celebrating you leaving the school finally. You know how terrible you are! It serves you right! Poor Mrs. Ng, she must have done something wrong in her previous life to have a student like you.” Jane made a grimace at me. I was her only mock and I enjoyed playing my role; well, most of the time.

“Graduation, finally!” I sighed with relief. Frankly, I didn’t like going to school. I never did since I entered primary one. I would look outside the window, instead of listening to the rattle of my teachers. I would be asked to stand beside the red sandalwood door, every time I was late for school. The formidable door, meant to fill its prisoners with awe, seemed to slam against freedom, the odors of life beyond its governance. They are all behind me now and I’m glad that they are gone. Or, should I mourn, should I always recall in remembrance, its stately red brick building or the scenery along the way to school. Yes, the red brick house, I shall always cherish, whose history stretches back to a century ago; the colonists built it in the style of their predecessors, the Romans. Even during the hottest days in the year, when all the branches and leaves of the surrounding trees, gilded in gold, were whirling under the summer breezes, her tranquility would not be disturbed by sunshine penetrating its solemn corridors punctuated by columns, haunted by the ghosts of the past. And the small garden was our favorite. After lunch, when the second term had just started, we would take a walk to see the orchid blossoms, and their tears, so delicate, like a dream that could not survive the night, only to vanish in the next morning. But the garden would never feel lonely, as there were flowers for all seasons. My history teacher, who was never married and almost as old as the building itself, looked after them. She had spent most of her life teaching at the school. She commanded respect from everyone, which was due to her- the immortal monument of our school. But even her, our monument, is going to leave the school - retire, is the word they use. What does it feel like to be the host of one place for all your life and then be denied it in the next minute? Maybe with the approach of old age, I will arrive at an answer. But at the time, they are still fresh in my memory, not yet sour, not yet bitter.

Jane and I shared our love towards archaic buildings. When we went home together, she would point to one of the buildings along the road and say to me that it was her dream house. It was

a three-storey high pre-war mansion, with balconies and wooden window frames. “Someday I would live in that house and your name would never appear in my guest book!” “Suit yourself!” What a fool! Jane was sometimes vexing.

It seems so unreal. In an instant, I think I am still a secondary student. My bulky school bag and those silly uniforms are still there. It seems that when the new semester starts we will all fly back to school as usual.”

“You won’t see me next year unless we go to the same university or we both fail the exam.”

“That’s impossible. Universities are not for my type and your folk will never fail the exam.”

“You will be alright. It is not that difficult. The required score for your first choice is pretty low.” Hai! But still it’s too difficult for my dear Jane. It’s a hopeless business. Jane was never a smart girl. Even now I can recall those hard times when Jane was struggling with her history assignments. Jane found it extremely difficult to write long essays. When she needed to write one, she would prefer to write it in school so that her suffering would be shared by another fool. The long after school hours would always start with Jane working alone on her assignment and I wandering around thumbing through books. So if you need to locate any books in that library, just ask me, I can find it without even using my eyes. Then Jane would start asking questions and the interval between them would gradually shorten. This process continued till I finally surrendered and sat down by her side. The rest of the time would be spent on writing the outline, which was my job, and doing some dictations, which was Jane’s work. I always thought that I should cosign the assignment with her. She was the most troublesome person in the world! I confess I did entertain a sense of superiority, yes I did. It was a feeling that I was constantly trying to deny. Now I’ve learned to come to terms with it; and it cannot change the fact that I did, and still do care for her.

Those crazy school days ~

“It’s bitter,” Jane said after taking a sip of her beer, “I can’t understand why those people love to drink this sort of thing.”

“Come on! You are no longer a little girl. And the first thing you should learn is how to drink a glass of beer. Welcome to the adult world! Cheers!” To set a model, I emptied half of the cup. At once, a mixture of all sorts of bitterness was churning in my mouth before I was engulfed by surge of fever in my head that almost blurred my senses.

“What are you going to do?” Jane asked, using her monotonous voice.

“We can go to the seaside if you want.”

“I mean your career in the future. Have you ever thought about that, you idiot!”

“No, probably I will join the unemployed population. You know the reputation of the arts faculty-the factory of future beggars.” I laughed, though I shouldn’t. What else could you do besides laugh? Jokes were all we needed. To be frank, I had never seriously considered my future career. But I did think a bit about that. The conclusion seemed to be I didn’t want to do anything. No aspirations at all!

I am not a realistic person, excitable, volatile yet tenacious, full of utopian ideals and philosophical ideas, always feeling a vocation for one thing after another and have tried half a dozen, only to get sick of each one immediately and throw myself into new projects. Jane was quite the opposite, always calm, equable, contented, like any ordinary girl you would meet in the street. What will become of such a girl in ten years time? And me, a conceited drifter. How can we ever get rid of life’s mediocrity? Maybe we should try to throw ourselves on the alternative life... try to live according to the art of life...

“Cheers! For our bright future!” I toasted.

“You are definitely a very ambitious person! But you once told me that you wanted to be a teacher.” She beat my arm with her fist.

“Did I really say I wanted to be a teacher?” I was amazed. Me, a teacher? Jane really took what I said seriously. That reminded me of all those wonderful promises. When I was a child, I used

to say that I wanted to be the guy who sold ice cream on the street. I said I wanted to be a pilot when I saw a plane fly over my head. I wanted to be a chef when I saw my uncle who was a chef. When I started going to school I said I wanted to be a teacher. All these, wonderful promises, were told by my mother, in front of all her relatives as a sort of grow-up legends. My mom is the one who always picks at my slovenliness. Just a few years ago, I vowed that I would enter the science stream and become a doctor. My mom was the one most pleased with my “decision” Being a doctor was once her dream and she wanted me to fulfill it. Nevertheless, I became an arts student and would continue to be one. Breaking promises, that’s no big deal! I bet that there is no one in this world who dares to say that he has never broken a promise. After all, you are not the captain of your own ship.

“No, you should not be a teacher. It is a kind of waste. It’s better for you to further your study abroad. How about going to the US? To live in a big house, enjoy the beaches and sunshine in California?”

“~ the American dream~ the American dream~” I started humming a song from Miss Saigon. “Go to America, then what? Beg in Chinatown?” For a moment, I thought I was drunk, from a cup of beer. That’s shameful, I thought. America, Ha! The great age of the American dream is gone forever!

“I am talking to you seriously. You are not like me. You will have a bright future, you know? You should go abroad and you will have plenty of opportunities. You can go to Harvard, Yale, maybe Columbia or UC. Hong Kong is too small. You are a smart person. Don’t let me think for you. I am stupid.”

“Too small?”

(Nothing is bigger than life; I am beginning to grasp the fact lately.)

I laughed, in a wrong place and a wrong time. I hated that seriousness, which made me short of breath. Why couldn’t we relax and go shopping, just like we used to do after school. We used to hunt for Christmas gifts together. We used to roam through every corner in Causeway Bay and

Mong Kok with a playful heart. So strange, not that long ago, you were dressed up like a doll and receiving pocket money as your revenue. All of a sudden, people started to talk seriously, and ask all sorts of questions, as though they were caught up in a frenzy.

“You are different. You will be the pride of our class. I will be... if lucky enough, I will be a clerk. But you will fly high and I will be proud to be your friend. But will you still remember me? No, you wouldn't; it's all written in your palm prints. You ruthless person.” She grasped my hand, examined it, then smiled, in a melancholy way, like she was abused, cheated and unable to revenge her suffering.

“You've got a long career line, see, here, it's your fate.?”

“Let me make it clear. I have one head, two eyes, one nose and one mouth and I am not different from you. Secondly, I don't want to go to America. I hate beaches and sunshine. Thirdly, I don't have enough money to go abroad. Lastly, why don't you just save your damn philosophies of fatalism, reincarnation, and keep your mouth shut and let me finish my drink!” Almost immediately I realized that I had said something terribly wrong. Silence followed. Too familiar with that. It was the same silence when I was thirty minutes late for our date. She would turn her head away and avoid talking to me. That's our cold war. Then I would start making some jokes or rattling on some trivial matters. No apology. No regret. Do you believe that? Seven years, without saying sorry.

“Don't be a clerk, you should find someone to marry you. Find an ideal husband...”

“...”

“...”

I was waiting, waiting for the ice to melt and it would.

“I am picky...”

“I know. Your ideal husband will be a handsome, tender, generous, rich, preferably

seventy-year old male.” Jane hit me on the head this time.

“Money is important.”

“You will get enough money if you want to. Your mom will support you. After all you are the only child in the family. If you want to go to Britain, nothing can stop you. Hai! Why do some people always enjoy privileges over the others, always have the luxury to choose...”

“...”

“You once told me you wanted to further your study abroad.”

“If I know what I really want...” I really appreciated she remembered the things I said. My mom will do everything she can for me. But there is not much she can do. Jane is the eldest and still has two little brothers after her. They say there is always a kind of vague jealousy, one of those dormant jealousies that develop between brothers or sisters, which keep them constantly on the alert in a fraternal, unaggressive hostility. Jane, two years older than her first and three years older than her second brother, must have looked with hostility upon the other two animals that had suddenly appeared in her mother’s and father’s arms and were so loved and cherished by them. Perhaps, this was her first lesson learned - to accept frustrations in life. Her amiable nature alone, I’m afraid, would render her powerless in this scramble for concessions within the family. She is on her own...

## **Finale**

By the time they left Memory, the revelry had just started. The night was taken over by those real nighthawks. In the end, they didn’t empty their cups. It was too bitter. The floating world of pleasure was never meant for those who had not yet learned the rules of the game.

Unable to part at once yet ignorant of what could be done next, they strode raging through the damp, polluted city air. It was a long road in a dark night. The sky had choked back its tears. Pools on the road reflected yet another glorious world. As for Tarzan, an objective distance of a few years time had gained her new insight into the whole experience. But still she did not realize that this was



the end, without twilight or compromise, that she should never cross Jane's track again. She thought it was just another gathering; they had their small quarrel and had solved it and no more. At the time, she would accompany her to the station, and at that very moment of departure, she would let her train of thought, their garden, their red-brick building, their graduation, their past, their future, to put on a riotous display in her mind, just let them to dissipate in the next moment, as she watched the bus submerged by the heart of darkness, carrying her friend away.

# A Response to Emily Dickinson's "My Life has stood – a Loaded Gun –"

Janice LEUNG Tsz Man

My Life has stood - a loaded gun -  
ready to shoot - ready to strike -  
he who invented Me -  
so proud of his art -  
ignorant of My power -

for I have the power to kill -  
without - the power to die -  
I will - One day -  
overtake - My master -  
or even - override -  
with My bullets - zeros and ones -

# Stamina

Janice LEUNG Tsz Man

The chocolate skin melts  
into the yellow helmet,  
matching the orange vest  
striped with lemony fluorescein  
under the baking sun.

Rusty grey wheelbarrows  
push loads of sand cemented  
by sweat and blood.

Sparkles from the magic wand,  
dazzling white fireworks  
bind steels together  
reaching for the turquoise sky  
where the tycoons sit  
in leathery armchairs  
tasting blood-red  
Chateau Lafite.

# The Red Plastic Bags in My Grandma's Bed

Ellen LO Mou In

## I

'Grandma... Grandma! Are you in?' I call loudly after knocking the door for a while.

'Yes, coming!' Some hasty footsteps approach the door. Then, a small round head with a black headband comes to fetch the door - Grandma always wears a headband to keep her thin grey hair from her face. Though she tries hard to lift her head, she merely raises her eyes to look at me. She is stooped.

'Were you asleep?' I grab the china vase on top of the refrigerator and fill it with tap water, half-full.

'No, I was just tidying up - Auntie Mei is coming this afternoon.' She returns to deal with the plastic bags in her bed.

I take out the withering chrysanthemums from the vase and empty them into the rubbish bin. I've brought red daisies for you.' I then replace them with a new bunch.

'Aiya, how many times have I told you? Red color is no good for people of my age,' Grandma complains. 'This color is too loud. Not suitable for the old.'

'Why not?' I protest, 'Aren't you fed up with dark colors? Red can make the room brighter.'

## II

I had a prejudice for red when I was young. My mahogany dressing table, my comb, my silk cheongsams and my shoes were all in red. And Auntie Ying would put red roses into the glass vase on the fireplace every day, which filled the room with a scent of romance.

Whenever I went out to play on the streets, Auntie Ying would tie my hair with a bright red ribbon. Villagers, in their dark blue and black suits, would stare at me as they whispered to each other.

'I want to have a red butterfly like hers, Mama,' a girl of my age tugged the corner of her mother's brown apron, but the poor girl just got a frown and a 'sh' in return. Actually, I was more than willing to give her my tiny red ribbon in exchange for permission to join the village children's funny and wild games. But before I could do so, her mother had already dragged her back into their cottage.

On the way home, Auntie Ying told me about her childhood games to cheer me up. After listening to all of them I asked, 'Why can't I play hide-and-seek with them?'

She just said, 'You are a lucky little red butterfly.'

## I

I once suspected that Grandma was color-blind as she could hardly tell the green color from red. That's why she always put my bright red dress into my sister's closet. Every time, I have to take the two dresses out and point to her, 'Ar Qing's dress is as green as a frog, while mine is as red as an invitation to a wedding.'

She would glance elsewhere, pretending to be looking for something while I am talking. 'Can you hear what I said, Grandma? ... Grandma?'

I would have to raise my voice, 'Did you hear me?'

'Of course I did. I ain't deaf' She would then groan, 'I am old, but not deaf yet.'

And next time, she would again put my red dress into Ar Qing's closet.

## II

Whenever there were any important occasions, like a wedding ceremony or the Lunar New Year, Father would have the tailor come to make new clothes for me. Auntie Ying would then use the bits and pieces of cloth left to make small finger-like bags filled with beans. The game went as the player threw the bags upward and grabbed the beans spread on the table in the short moment before the bags fell down for him to catch. Auntie Ying excelled at this game and I wished I had her slim white hands, which could move as fast as a snake.

One day as we were playing this game again, I heard some guys singing a strange song outside. The bean-filled red bags slumped onto my hands.

'Who is singing? Let's go out to have a look!' I asked Auntie Ying, putting the game at the back of my mind.

The lyrics became clearer and clearer as we approached the group playing outside.

'In the Red Red Eastern Sky

The Sun Rises

In China, a man called Mao Zedong arises'

They were the village children and the sight of them really shocked us - they each had a red scarf round their neck and their chest pockets were propped up by a small red booklet inside. The crowd cast a quick contemptuous glance at us and spat onto the ground in disdain. Before we could react, they fled.

Mao Zedong? Who's Mao Zedong? A General in the ancient times? A god? Or just a name made up to match the melody? Why were they wearing red? I had never seen the villagers wearing red, except in Lunar New Year. I had not a single idea about all these questions. Nor did I like the song, though it carried the color red.

We did not know we had already been drawn into the red tide.

## I

To the whole family, Grandma is like a witch living on the very top of an insurmountable mountain of plastic bags. Every time when I go to her place, I am confronted with piles and piles of Park'n Shop and Wellcome plastic bags, and also bags in white, yellow, green and - red.

'Why do you store so many plastic bags at home?' A dead silence.

'Grandma, what are you going to do with SO many plastic bags?' I attempt to clear away the

bags.

'Don't you touch them! They are very useful indeed,' she protests.

'They can easily catch fire, Grandma,' I try to persuade her.

'They don't cause fire. People do.'

Don't you think that they produce an odd smell?' I make my last effort.

She sniffs the air and says, 'There's no smell. You are too allergic to smell.'

## II

The air smelled differently after that incident. Auntie Ying did not bring me out any more. Therefore, I could only play with the goldfish and the carp in my small box-like garden. I pouted, but she did not give way as usual. Then I knew that something really serious was taking place - something I was not told and something I did not understand.

That 'thing' was uncovered very soon. The next morning, I was woken up by the shouting and crying outside.

A group of teenagers in their green uniforms and red scarves, accompanied by some villagers, were marching into my garden. Auntie Ying tried to block their way, but was immediately pushed aside by the crowd. The throng was crying furiously and excitingly. 'Down with the snaky bourgeois!' they yelled, shaking their fists. Sweat rolled down suntanned foreheads, as if they were boiling with rage too.

'Red is the revolutionary color, but not for the unscrupulous landlord,' the leading guy said. My wardrobe of red cheongsams was torn into pieces and scattered on the floor like bloodstains; my embroidery sets, my toys, my dressing table... all shattered.

How could they burn Father's precious old books and break his china? How could they make Father kneel before the villagers and confess? All these completely slipped my mind. I only heard the clinking and thumping intercepted occasionally by Auntie Ying's cry when I was asleep. I

felt like I was traveling on a speedy train as faces of the Red Guards were all blurred.

## I

One can never figure out what's going on in Grandma's head. The way she positions her plastic bags reminds me of my swimming trophies, which she will not hesitate to show to her friends and relatives, like Auntie Mei.

'Ar Yee really has a talent in swimming,' Grandma sighs as if it is a regrettable thing, but her eyes are smiling.

'She has inherited it from you. God knows how we swam all the way to Hong Kong!' Auntie Mei is one of Grandma's friends from the Mainland.

'At that time, all we could rely on was just a big black rubber tyre. Ha ha... they laugh bitterly.

'Remember? We were trembling like leaves when we got out of the water,' Grandma smiled.

'Of course. Soaked in water for the whole night!'

I expect to hear their laughter, but there is just an awkward silence in the living room.

'Ar Yee, tea!' Grandma orders me in a reproachful manner, breaking the dead air.

'What kind of tea do you want? There're so many tins and cans in your cupboard.'

'The Jasmine tea on the shelf above the stove,' Grandma instructs me, 'Don't use the water in the pot to make the tea. It is not hot enough. Get it boiled first.'

Then she turns to Auntie Mei, 'I have taught her many times, but the tea she made is still either too watery or too strong.'

After a long pause, Auntie Mei says, 'They are too young to understand all these, anyway.'



## II

After the Red Guards had finally gone that night, I slept in the middle of the house.

Before me was a piece of red cloth, fluttering wildly in the wind. I turned around to escape, but found myself enclosed totally by this piece of red- it was neither rosy red nor crimson red. I could not look at it directly, lest I would be pierced in my heart by the dazzling bright red. Running away from it did not make any sense at all, as it was everywhere. I cried and called Father and Auntie Ying, yet there seemed to be no one but myself. Then, when I suddenly remembered that Father had been taken away by the Red Guards while Auntie Ying had been forced to leave the house, I woke up.

From that night onward, my dream was no longer in red.

## I

After Auntie Mei has gone, Grandma wanders around the home, not knowing what to do. She keeps yawning.

'Why don't you take a nap? You are tired.' I say. She gets tired very easily lately.

I take out my Psychology textbook from my knapsack while Grandma is sleeping. How many times can I enjoy quietness in the house when she is awake?

'Sto... Stop... Stop...' she murmurs something. Oh, please!

'What's the matter, Grandma?' I study her.

But she does not wake up. Her eyebrows knit so closely together and her eyelids shut so tightly that I can see she is in a nervous state even when she is sleeping. Sleeping among the heaps of plastic bags in her bed, she seems to have shrunken even more. I remember I could barely reach her elbow when she brought me to the primary school.

Now, I can hardly see her face when I stand up.

## II

I had forgotten about the dream when I woke up the next morning. Throughout these years, the dream had never come to my mind. Nonetheless, it popped up from the air one day and the details were even more vivid than what I dreamt that night. Everyday there would be new details added to it. They just sprang up from nowhere. All the same, I would get very excited and spend the whole day pondering on the newly discovered things, as if I had made significant progress in research. And I would then write down all those things that came up. I felt there was a new flush in my mind and my youth had returned for me.

My youth...

## I

A familiar smell itches my nostrils. A gray shadow is moving in front of the refrigerator. I rub my eyes.

'We'll have salted fish tonight,' Grandma is taking out the leftovers from the refrigerator, 'Remember? You loved it so much when you were just this size,' with a wrinkled smile, she imitates my height by putting her right hand beside her left elbow.

'Oh, it's eight already! Why don't you wake me up, Grandma?' My head aches when I think of the Psychology exam tomorrow.

'No school tomorrow. Tomorrow is Sunday.'

'Grandma, today is Sunday and tomorrow is Monday! I come here every Sunday, remember?' I flip through the textbook hurriedly.

Grandma ignores me but asks, 'What did you dream about? I have never seen you smile so sweetly.'

'Nothing! Just some silly jokes!' I can feel that my face is burning. I must switch the topic.

'Er... what did you have for lunch today, Grandma?'

She says slowly, 'Of course I have had lunch. The sweet n' sour pork you cooked yesterday is too sour.'

After a while I mutter, 'I did not cook it yesterday, but last month, Grandma.'

'It's too sour. You added too much vinegar.' She goes on talking, 'Your mother ate too much ginger vinegar when you were still in her stomach, Ar Qing.'

Finally I understand why there are five plates of leftover salted fish in the refrigerator.

## II

We were like a dish of fried fish. Our heads were baked under the bright red sun and we kept walking at a fast pace lest the steaming ground would hurt our feet.

Every day, we, the girls from the 'black families' had to wake up in the dead of the night and walk for several hours to collect firewood on a hill. On the way, the supervisor always reminded us of our sins and 'black' family background. 'How lenient our Chairman Mao is! You gals should be grateful to the Party for being given a chance to receive labour education...'

I could hear him no more. His words seemed to come from a distant mountain and my vision was all blurred. I felt like I was melting as I walked down the hill with huge bundles of firewood on my shoulders.

'Tup!' a bundle of firewood had fallen down. I looked back but only found a girl lying on the ground. Her cheek was so red that one would think she had worn make-up.

'Get up.' The supervisor ordered coldly.

Her hands moved a bit, trying to reach for the bundles fallen onto the ground. But she lost her consciousness shortly.

'Don't pretend. Get up or I'll report to the Party.' He kicked her. But she did not move.

'She's not pretending.?'

'She needs a doctor!'

'Poor Ar Mei!'

'Does anyone have any medicated oil?'

The girls gathered around the fainted girl and discussed loudly, quite forgetting themselves. And some were trying to lift her up.

The supervisor shouted furiously, 'Get back to work! Don't think that you can escape from work by imitating her!'

Before I turned away, I heard him cry to the girl on the ground, 'Ungrateful counterrevolutionary bitch! Let's see how long you can pretend in this way...'

At dinner time, they said that the girl had died. I heard more stifled sobbing than ever that night. We all knew: she was killed by the sun.

## I

'Grandma, have you taken the pills?' I pat her on her shoulders and obviously, she is totally taken aback.

'Pills, Grandma,' then I remember the doctor's instructions: Use simple words to communicate with her.

'Pills? I don't want pills! I am not sick!' she gets into her tantrum.

'No, no no... they are not pills. They can keep you healthy and strong.'

'NO! I WILL NOT TAKE THEM! THEY ARE POISONS!' she screams and sweeps the pills and the glass of water onto the floor. The glass shatters into pieces while the water splatters onto my dress.

'You!' I shout, 'How can you...'

'I don't want pills!' Grandma stumps to her bed and covers her head with a blanket.

I start to clear the mess and wipe the floor. I do not know how to deal with Grandma. The doctor said she was suffering from Senile Dementia, which meant she would lose all her cognitive skills as well as memory one day. In other words, she will become a dummy. It was decided that I should be the one to take care of Grandma as I am 'the only suitable person for this job?' in Mum's words. I know what they meant - I am the most unproductive one in the family. But why do I have to shoulder all these? Why does god choose Grandma?

I hate Mum. I hate Ar Qing. I hate Grandma. I hate my family. I hate this ridiculous world!

## II

I think I will soon forget everything.

I know I will soon forget how to write.

I understand I will soon forget my husband, my son, my grandchildren and my friends.

What is left then?

What can I rely on?

...

...

## I

The quietness in the room is interwoven with Grandma's even breathing under the blanket. I rearrange the blanket to cover her body instead of her face.

What a sight to sleep with plastic bags! Is everyone's grandmother as weird as mine? I hope I will not be interested in sleeping with Kellogg's boxes or pot lids when I get old.

There is something hard among her piles of plastic bags. What is it?

Oh, it's an ordinary black leather-covered notebook. Just as I am ready to put it aside, a thought flashes in my mind. I flip through the pages very quickly. Pages of words and words and words. Some are neatly written but some are hardly recognizable. It is not like an ordinary diary as it isn't even dated. Then what's this?

Seeing Grandma in her sleep with her mouth half-opened, I open the notebook carefully. The first line comes into sight.

*'I had a prejudice for red when I was young...'*

\* \* \*

A smile climbs stealthily onto my Grandma's face. Is it that she has found the life buoy that she can cling to in her dream?

So, here is my Grandma, sleeping soundly and safely in the warm bosom of her delicate and perfectly ordered red plastic bags.

# Nothing

Tad CHAN Yin Tat

Infants come with innocence,  
Leave with memories.

Yesterday,  
Motionless echoes, colourless thoughts.  
Today,  
Tasteless breaths, transparent sensations.  
Tomorrow,  
Soundless whispers, neutral wishes.

He's born,  
She's aging,  
It's sick,  
They'll leave.

Nothing really matters, anyone can see,  
Nothing really matters,  
Nothing really matters, to me.

# An Advertisement

Garfield LAU Chi Sum

Freckles are thorns in her heart.  
She can never treat them as an art.  
For they force her to resign  
From the contract she's about to sign.

Models with perfect skins  
View the tiny flaws as sins.  
They look like rice that no one desires  
And isobars made of broken wires.

All her earnings are spent  
On concealers that make her feel content.  
An angel comes to her dream  
Leaving her a bottle of whitening cream.  
Then she gets up with a charming face  
It's Chanel that brings her such a grace.



# The Process of Initiation

YANG Guang

## Zhao Ren

The bell rang angrily.

“Go to answer the door, Ah Mei!” I said to my twelve-year-old daughter, busy with chopping pork in the kitchen.

“Who’s that?” My voice floated toward the door from the kitchen, in the company of the rhythm of “Da Da Da.....Da Da” sound.

“It’s me, your old classmate!”

“Bang!” The knife dropped onto the chopping board, my fingers narrowly escaped from bleeding.

How can it be possible! At hearing the most familiar and most strange voice, I just couldn’t be more surprised.

“Why on earth did he come?” Is there something wrong with my always keen ears? But any hypothesis was completely erased at the moment a face appeared in front of me.

“God!” I stood in amazement. “What a remarkable change! Wong Qi’s fatty body has lost a lot of weight!” I observed in the first sight.

“How is everything with you in recent years? I know you have had a heart problem for years. It’s an unusually cold winter this year and I am always concerned about your health so I came here to see you,” Mr. Wong said sincerely.

“Well, well.....” I didn’t even know what to say. “It’s so thoughtful of you to come to see me. Thank you for your concern. I’m afraid my heart is still a problem. It hurts when I am doing heavy physical work. But it’s OK most of the time.”

“I have brought some high quality ginseng with me for you. I think it’s good for your health—I have a firm faith in Chinese traditional medical treatment!” Mr. Wong said with a warm smile, thrusting a beautiful and gorgeous fat box into my hands.

“No, no, don’t, don’t please!” I was startled by Mr. Wong’s even odder behaviour. “I can’t, I can’t accept it. Please keep it for yourself! This kind of stuff will do you good, too!”

“Don’t stand on ceremony, OK? After all, we have known each other for almost twenty years, from the first day of college till now. We shared the same dormitory, had meals together and entered the same factory after we graduated. WE should be as close as before. I’m really sorry for what I have done to you! Forgive me, please! Forgive me for all the wrongs that I have done you. I’m really ashamed of myself.....” Wong couldn’t continue, tears blurring his eyes.

Standing still, I couldn’t utter a single word, either, out of extreme surprise. I even wondered if I was in a state of day-dreaming.

“But, Mayor Wong, you, you?”

“Don’t call me Mayor Wong. Call me ‘*Smelly Shrimp*’! OK? ‘*Soft Crab*’!”

“Well smelly, smelly shrimp.....” Honestly speaking, I would rather kill myself than say Wong’s nickname, which was used in college. But when hearing Wong called me by my nickname “Soft Crab”, I had a desire to cry, although I couldn’t tell why.

To me, maybe it was the most unforgettable, incredible and happiest moment since I finished my college education. “Smelly Shrimp” had changed a lot since graduation. During a couple of years, Wong became a completely different person. I, as Wong’s so-called “diehard follower”, couldn’t believe my own eyes. Wong was no longer the warm-hearted, considerate, thoughtful “smelly shrimp” but a snobbish, arrogant and greedy stranger. He came into his kingdom by mercilessly trampling anyone who got in his way. Considering Wong’s inherent outstanding intelligence and numerous skills, it’s no wonder that he could gain everything he dreamed of in a mere few years after graduation. Beyond all doubt, he was the most successful guy among dozens of his classmates. Although holding the same level of diploma in the factory that we were both assigned to, Wong was promoted steadily and quickly and he even turned out to be the chief director of the factory within eight years while I am still a small potato now, partly because I’m not

so enthusiastic about such affairs, partly because of Wong's "good deed". Wong left the factory with the reputation as a "diligent, imaginative and determined man" when he had succeeded in obtaining a high position in the local government. From then on, the connection between us vanished at a dramatic speed, which is quite natural, indeed. After all, it makes no sense for a mayor to care about a low class guy from whom he can't gain anything valuable.

However, all of a sudden, Wong unexpectedly appeared with an incredible change. It seemed for me that I saw the "Smelly Shrimp" again.

What on earth was wrong?

\* \* \*

### **Ding Ding**

What have I done recently that makes Papa so good to me? I just can't figure it out!

Papa is always busy and he seldom shares time with mom and me. He is so serious and sometimes even horrible to me!

"Off my knees!" "Don't bother me!" "I have told you millions of times not to put your hands on the documents over there!" These are Papa's common responses when I show my affection.

Papa's health condition is mom's biggest concern. It seems that he has endless banquets to attend every week. It's always the case that papa gets home quite late, drunk, in the company of one or two assistants. I'm fascinated with the effect of alcohol! Sometimes, Papa is in high spirits as if he is on the top of the world, which is the perfect opportunity to ask him for something I'm dreaming of, such as fabulous chocolate bars, toy guns, and the like, and I always end up with absolute satisfaction. However, Papa can also be a horrific monster after the banquets. He may murmur something unclearly time and time again, mixed with some dirty words that I can't believe are produced by my well-educated papa!

Papa said to me that a good boy shouldn't cry under any circumstances, but why has he himself failed to say goodbye to tears? This morning I was astonished to find that Papa put his

finger in his eye, crouching in mom's arms like an infant, complaining of something tearfully. What's wrong with Papa?

And what's more, Papa even offered to attend to the Parent Meeting, which is held every semester after the final examination. I'm in grade four now and it seems that attending the meeting is mom's "exclusive privilege" for four years! Papa never pays any attention to my school business for he can't afford to waste two or three hours on such "trivial stuff". Everyone in my class or even in the whole school knows Papa well although he hasn't showed himself in my school. I won't be surprised if they manage to spot papa in the crowd of parents. Everyone adores Papa and thinks highly of him, except me. However, suddenly, my opinion towards Papa has changed, as a result of Papa's dramatic change.

Maybe the wicked fairy bewitched Papa so Papa suddenly changed from a bad guy to a good man, who is just the type of father I have been dreaming of. Papa said that he was sorry for what he had done to me and he apologized to me for that again and again and asked for my forgiveness, which isn't supposed to be the conventional manner of a father. He frequently asks me about my school life, checks my homework, calls my head teacher Miss Sun to exchange ideas about my behaviour in school, and even offers to take me to Kid's Paradise, a terrific amusement park located in the neighboring city, which always appears in my dream.

Dream, dream, dream! I really wonder whether I am in a state of daydream? But when I nip my thigh bitterly, it hurts a lot, which indicates that I'm not in a dream but the real world. I have performed this test several times, and none of them failed.

Yes, Dad must be bewitched, I'm sure!

But what a horrible thing it will be if one day Papa gets rid of the wicked fairy and returns to "normal" as suddenly as the process has shifted to abnormal, and leave me crying helplessly!

\* \* \*

**Lin Shuang**

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light,*

*it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.”*

The beginning of *Tale of Two Cities* suddenly becomes my favourite excerpt, which I didn't like and considered dry and artificial in the past. Nothing can be more accurate in reflecting my present feeling, a most mixed feeling.

Nobody will deny that he is a successful man. Every time I was introduced by my friend to another person, it always went like this “This is Lin Shuang, our “First Lady” in this city.” Frankly speaking, this kind of title really offends me a bit for I feel I am not a companion with the same dignity but only a foil to him. But I can be worse in another countries because at least Chinese wives can keep their surnames after marriage. Everyone around me just can't help expressing their admiration or rather jealousy to me saying “What a lucky guy you are!” I'm really tired of such words. However, at the same time, I have to admit that I'm proud of him and I'm proud to be his wife.

Qi received his bachelor's degree in the late 1970's among the first batch of people who benefited from the resumption of the University Entrance Examination, which was canceled during the Cultural Revolution. So having a bachelor's degree, which isn't a big deal now, was really something in those days. Qi is among those called “the favourite son of God”. He is the only person that had the opportunity to go to university in his hometown. What a glory! I am proud of him from the bottom of my heart. Qi got the position as a department manager of a motor manufactory within three years after his graduation, which usually takes an average guy no less than ten years to achieve. And what's more, he left the factory and became the mayor of the city of Liqiao at the age of 32, the youngest mayor in Linqiao's history.

Like Qi, I enjoy the feeling of being adored, being quoted, being on the headline in the local newspaper from time to time, although it's for my husband's sake. I always laugh at myself for my ridiculous vanity, which is frequently described as the main shortcoming of women. Besides, it can't be more obvious that most of the pleasant words and the smiling faces aren't out of sincerity at all. However, who cares? What is the difference between the two?

I didn't believe in fate in the past, which I always considered as a kind of stupid superstition. I was brought up in a Communist country and the concept of antitheism is deeply and firmly rooted

in my heart since I was a kid. However, when I became Qi's wife, everything was changed step by step, both inside and outside. I am always suddenly awakened at midnight by a nightmare with an unidentified horror. Who am I? Where do I live? Does this huge house belong to me and is the man lying beside me my husband? The shining furniture reflects a strange and vague face. Who is she? Is it me? Why she is so pale?

I am always wondering if it is because I have received too much more than I deserve and God can't help doing something to me. But, is it the case that I am really so happy that even God is jealous? No, it isn't true at all! I'm not happy! I would prefer a plain but warm home to a gorgeous apartment; I would prefer a humble husband without a high position as long as he can share time with me to a "big shot" who belongs to his title but not his wife.

And all of a sudden, I get the very life that I am longing for!

Qi spends as much time as possible with me in recent days and the time we share in a single day now is more than a whole month in the past. His gentle touch and the expression in his eyes recall to me the dusty memory when we were in fiery love on campus, which seems like centuries and centuries ago.

However, it is by no means a comedy. This fabulous happiness is only a short prelude preparing for a real tragedy that will last forever.

Now, currently, at present, I'm in a state of an ecstasy of delight followed by an ecstasy of sorrow.

Here, today, at the moment, I'm going with the setting sun, which goes off the most glaring and charming rays when standing at the threshold of decay.

Qi told me he was extremely sorry for the way he treated me in the past years.

"What a fool I was for ignoring the most valuable thing in life and addicting myself to the game of pursuing the so-called "course" and fame, and for hurting many innocent people in the process. What a crook I was! If only I could correct all the mistakes that I've made! But, but I've got no time left! Why do I have no chance to make up my faults when I realize I'm wrong and ready to turn over a new leaf? Why? Why?"

He wept bitterly in my arm, desperately, like a helpless child. I patted him gently on the back, without a single word for I'm clear that no matter what I say, it is no use. I've made every effort to hold my tears back but all the attempts proved in vain. We Chinese have a saying "Man won't shed tears easily, only because he hasn't encountered the really heartrending thing." It's the first time Qi has cried in front of me, I mean, when he is sober-headed. He did cry once or twice when he was deeply drunk but it was all about the "battles" in officialdom, which had nothing to do with his real personal life.

"Anyway, let's make the most use of the precious days we still have! I'm glad I've been initiated. After all, better late than never." Qi said, with tears on his cheek.

I nodded, heavily, holding him tightly with all my strength.

\* \* \*

### **Aunt Fatty**

I just can't concentrate on anything since last Tuesday when my husband told me the sweetest news in the world. Even George W. Bush himself, having Saddam and Ben Laden kneel to beg his forgiveness, couldn't be happier than me now!

Which colour will I choose for the new curtains in our new apartment? Apple green or light orange? Maybe apple green would be better for it will match the green desk. No, light orange is much better! Green has been out of date and I will throw that old green desk away immediately when we move to the new apartment! Anyway, what's the good in keeping such ugly stuff since we have a new place to live?

Farewell, my "dove cage" You'll never lick us anymore! Never! We will have our own spacious, warm, cozy home in no time!

Just imagine it!

It was at 6 p.m. sharp last Tuesday that my dear Old Zhang released that incredibly good news to me. I didn't believe it at first and was even extremely angry with him for his nasty smile when he cried "Free at last! Free at last!"

“Don’t be so mean! You can talk about anything but this! Show a little mercy to my poor nerves!” I flew into a rage at hearing him mention my most serious pain in such a disgusting tone.

“Nothing can be more certain, I tell you, my old fatty, I mean, my lovely sweetheart! Mayor Wong promised to me this morning!”

“What? What do you mean? Are you sure you are all right now? I reached out my hand onto his forehead and said, “How strange, you haven’t got a fever!”

“Be serious, please! What’s the good of cheating you? This morning, Mayor Wong went to his office half an hour earlier than usual and what’s more he greeted me first with a warm smile even before I spoke to him.”

“Go on.” I was a little bit impatient.

“He said, ‘Uncle Zhang, I’m very concerned about your poor housing conditions. Five people live in a room less than ten square meters. It’s not a human house but a jail! I’m sorry for not solving this urgent problem for you and letting you and your whole family suffer for so many years. I’ll try everything I can to find you a spacious apartment as soon as possible. Nobody deserves better living conditions than you do! It’s your unshakable right and my duty to get it done! Trust me!’ He was quite sincere although his abruptly-changing attitude towards me really startled me. But anyway, I hold a firm belief that we can get rid of this crowded, stuffy and smelly ‘dove cage’ soon!”

“Sounds like a fairy tale!”, which is the first word that occurred to me.

“Yes! Mayor Wong chatted with me for quite a while and he even apologized to me for not having taken the old and the so-called ‘small potatoes’ such as me seriously for three years. He said, as a mayor, he didn’t fulfill the task that he was supposed to finish and he wasn’t a qualified mayor.”

“It seems that our mayor has realized something and has begun to pay attention to us ordinary people.”

“That’s what I’m thinking too!”



“You have the right to say so! Don’t forget you just called down a curse upon Mayor Wong the other day for his ‘absurd bad behaviour’.” I laughed at him as loudly as I could.

“Well, it’s no surprise that somebody will someday change suddenly someday. We can’t be more familiar with this kind of thing in novels and movies, can we? And this kind of dramatic sudden change, if my memory is reliable, is called ‘the process of initiation’ isn’t it?” Blinking his narrow eyes, he was extremely proud of his “profound” knowledge.

“Show off, again! But, well, I bet you’re right!”

Both of us burst into laughter. Who can imagine a mayor who treats his gatekeeper so well?

Oh, here comes my dear husband! I almost forgot who I was when I was savoring the biggest happiness just now.

“Honey, any good news to share with me today?” I come to him, smiling.

“What wrong have I done in preexistence that makes me have such a miserable this life!

“How can the face of a man with a decent position change so rapidly without any reason!

“What a ridiculous situation I was in this morning! What a fool I was!

“I haven’t been so angry for ages! I’m not a cross man but even the dead can’t stand what I just encountered!”

“What’s happened?” I was shocked by his most unusual words especially in these happy days.

Then he told me everything. Before he finished, I began to sob.

Fine minutes ago, I was in heaven; now, I am in hell.

“I still can’t figure out why Mr. Wong could be so mean to us. Is it great fun to play tricks on two old poor fellows like us? After dropping one word informing me that this housing problem

can't be solved now because more important projects should be taken into consideration due to the extremely limited funds of the local government, he left, expressionlessly, even not bothering to speak one more word to me." He was too excited to stop.

"Don't say anything more about what he did, please!"

\* \* \*

### **The Doctor**

Being a doctor isn't easy, indeed, especially a doctor specializing in cancer. And if the patient is a celebrity, the situation can be worse. If it is still not enough to reduce you to tears, then comes a misdiagnosis.

\* \* \*

### **Ah Liang**

"Morning, honey! Why do you look so upset? Is it because you miss me so badly that you couldn't sleep last night?" Failing to find the familiar charming smile on my sweetheart's face, my question was full of concern but my face showed a nasty grin.

"Well, the party of the unemployed has a newcomer." Li Li answered calmly.

"What? You were fired? What happened?"

"I mixed up two X-ray photographs when sorting them last week, which led to two patients' false diagnoses. You can imagine how seriously the patients were hurt especially the one that was diagnosed as deep-rooted liver cancer but in fact it was just a tumour."

"But everybody may make mistake. How can....."

"But it's different his time. The victim is Mayor Wong."

"What?" I understood everything in a split second.

“He said it’s me that almost uprooted his hope of tremendous success in the future and made a fool of him as well. He also said if the mistake was kept uncorrected for another week, the consequence would be unconceivable.”

Poor baby!

“Not only I, Mayor Wong also did something to some other nurses and doctors and many of them are really innocent. The president of the hospital is even worrying about next year’s sustentation fund, which is regularly provided by the local government.”

“.....”

# The So-called Policy

Connie OR Ching Hung

SARS has finally left!  
Everyone becomes glad.  
Masquerades disappear,  
lively life reappears.  
The Government says,  
“We will do our best  
to help our economy.  
Promotion in tourism comes first.”  
It sounds nice, doesn't it?  
But, with the deficit,  
spending one hundred million  
on the music show  
on the Rolling Stones  
is just a waste!  
And I'm impressed  
by all the 'sliding-the-shoulder'<sup>1</sup> words.  
What is responsibility?  
People say, “No pain, No gain.”  
But I say, “No brain, No gain.”

1. A colloquial expression in Cantonese meaning to shrugs off responsibility.

# She and Me

Connie OR Ching Hung

Twenty years ago in a hospital  
Where a baby, and a baby, were born  
Know each other not, it was not vital  
They had their own ways to live on.

Eight years ago, wasn't it magical  
Life interacted with life and went on  
Know each other, was now vital  
She and I, same day, same place, were born!

Four years ago, life turned so practical  
She encouraged me, dawn after dawn  
Friendship blooms pretty as crystal.  
Let not our precious treasure be gone.  
Memory we now have, the traces of time.  
Our friendship, it is just like pine.

“The sky is so blue,” Tojo thought, and indeed it was. Autumn had come to Niao, Kyoto. A brisk sky was shining above the world, singing. Tojo closed his eyes and basked in the brilliance of it all; the sun, the sky, the wind, everything.

“Hahahaha, did you see the look in his face!”

Akuma squealed in delight, his portly face shining with sweat. He was a usual primary school bully: fat, stupid and relentless in picking on those weaker than himself. He had failed his examinations the past two years and was sent to repeat his eighth year for a third term.

“Come on, get up so I can see your pretty face!”

Akuma smiled a mouth full of crooked wickedness as he picked up his helpless victim. Tojo closed his eyes and eased himself. His body was used to the pain, but it was the look of madness in the eyes of his oppressor that made his stomach churn. It was the thought of how another felt pleasure from crushing a man that made him shiver. Then, Tojo heard the faint whisper of air parting like a wave. He heard the resounding thunder of a bamboo forest breaking upon human flesh. He felt himself falling, hitting the ground with a low dull thud.

“Hey. You ok?”

Tojo opened an eye precariously...and saw a hero. Right in front of him, hand extended with the sun at his back so that he was outlined in brilliance. Tojo’s savior. He had a head of brown hair that was held back with a red headband. The outline of his body showed a thin muscular frame with what seemed like a stick in his right hand.

“Yeah...yeah. I’m ok,” Tojo replied, and felt that his words were heavy and gawky. “What did you do?”

“Ha! No one can stand up against Blue Lightning!” With that, the strange character brought up his chosen weapon.

“What is it?” Tojo asked.

“This? This is Blue Lightning. My shinai. It’s what I use for Kendo. You ever heard?” Tojo shook his head. “Well come with and you will. You got a name?”

“...Tojo.”

“Tojo..well I’m Kakashi. Come on. Let’s go or else I’ll get caught.” Kakashi started heading towards the school entrance.

“Get caught...?” questioned Tojo.

“What did you think? That you can just beat people up and get away with it?”

Tojo took a look at a battered Akuma.

“I guess not.”

\* \* \*

The rhythmic sound of shinai on shinai rang through the air. Sharp cries accompanied them, filling the gymnasium with echoes that rumbled deep and low. All across the floor figures dressed in armor were engaging each other. They danced as their swords licked the air, watching for any hesitation, any weakness that would give ground towards victory.

“What do you think?” Kakashi casually leaned against the wall, arms wrapped around his personal shinai laid across his back. The words “Blue Thunder” struck like lightning, white on dark blue, wrapping around the handle.

Tojo stood a small distance away, adjusting the spectacles that never quite fit his narrow head. “The upperclassmen look pretty strong.”

“We’ll see,” said Kakashi, “Only a couple look like they even have a decent Waza. It seems half of them don’t know their Men from their Do. Look at them. Just flailing about.”

“You do realize we 俺 are only first years. They have at least three seasons on us.”

“Ah, but you forget what we do have. Elementary my dear Tojo: Talent.”

Tojo shrugged. “That’s you Kakashi. For me, I barely get by. Sometimes I wonder why I even do this.”

“The cruelest cut of all. Don’t tell me you don’t enjoy it.”

“You used a double negative. And I do enjoy it...sort of...I don’t know.” Tojo adjusted his glasses again. “I don’t like how people get a high off of beating someone else. It’s like I’m out there to crush someone. What’s the point of it all?”

“Well, shall we find out?” Kakashi flourished a bow towards the mat.

“You’ll win. You always do.”

Kakashi smirked, “Maybe you’ll get lucky.” They headed out towards the mat with Tojo in the rear.

\* \* \*

Tojo stared at Kakashi through his visor. “Just breathe, focus on his rhythm. Break his rhythm.” He shifted into a Jodan Waza stance and relaxed his mind. He sought the void in the moment, neither attacking nor defending, moving or unmoving. There is a pattern of the mind of your opponent. How he moves, how he strikes, how he defends. Break his pattern, and you break your opponent.

The two of them stood as statues, shinai raised in anticipation. Sweat trickled down the bases of their necks. Suddenly, Kakashi launched across the distance, a primal growl working in the back of his throat. He moved like lightning, swift and deadly, his sword a shadow of devastation. Tojo blocked high, and stepped through with a cut to the torso. Kakashi whipped his shinai into low position and caught Tojo’s attack on the upswing of his own.

Kakashi stuck with strokes of fury, his sword blurring throughout the air, leaving only the



sound of thunder against Tojo. Yet for all the power lightening has, it cannot affect the movement of water. Tojo flowed into each stroke, weaving through the tempest that was Kakashi. He glided from side to side, his sword moving stroke to stroke, cut to cut, like a leaf flows downriver.

Then, all at once, lightening struck...and found nothing. Kakashi stepped forward into a void. Time slowed as the rhythm of the moment was broken and lost. Kakashi froze, unsure where and what he was doing. Tojo hesitated. Time caught up. In the moment of certain victory, Kakashi spun low and hard, sword extended.

Lightening struck.

Tojo tore off his visor. Perspiration beaded his head. He looked over at Kakashi and saw a smile play over his lips.

“Record stands at 17-0 now Tojo. Actually, since we~~’~~re doing this official let’s start from the beginning: 1-0.”

“Are you so sure you won that round?”

It was a voice and it wasn’t a voice. It seemed all at once to come and then vanish in the air, like a magic trick too fast for the ears to follow.

“Did you say something?” Tojo turned, letting his shinai point touch the ground.

“I said are you sure you won that round? Why did you hesitate?” The figure faced Tojo, head cocked to the side as if anticipating his answer.

“Hesitate! Ha. The very thought. Ha! Ha! It’s laughable!” Kakashi’s commotion was now drawing a not so small crowd, something which never went outside his notice. “Perhaps we moved just a bit too fast for you. It wouldn’t be the first time my hands have moved faster than someone’s ey—”

The man brought up his sword before Kakashi could finish. It stopped a fraction of an inch from his eye. It was a cut with such speed and precision, that it took a full second before Kakashi could even react. He threw his head back and covered his eyes. It was a natural reaction for anyone,

one that was instinctively done by the body to protect itself. Kakashi did not take it well.

“Fast enough for you?” The man smirked and brought his shinai down. Kakashi flushed a deep crimson. Most thought it was from embarrassment. Tojo knew it was not, but before he could do anything Kakashi’s arms flew up in rage, his sword a blur towards the head of his attacker. A sound like the clap of thunder struck the hall, and Tojo saw the impossible. Blue Lightning clattered to the floor as Kakashi crumpled to the ground, moaning.

The new figure stared at Tojo for a moment, again, with his head cocked to the side. Tojo felt like a chicken being priced at a market.

“You have talent,” the man said, easing the shinai back to the ground, “You shouldn’t hold back so much.” With his free hand he tugged off his visor, only to show he was actually a she.

Tojo was startled, and actually stared. In front of him was, indeed, a girl. Her licorice dark hair was done up a bun with a red kerchief tied to keep it down. Her face shined with sweat which made her features all the more brilliant against the backdrop of her brown almond eyes.

“My name is Renda.”

“You are...a girl?”

“Is that a question?”

“I’m sorry,” Tojo looked at the ground. “It’s just... surprising.”

“Everyone says that.” She narrowed her delicate eyebrows with a look of resentment. A grimace played across rosebud lips. Such bitterness seemed misplaced on such an elegant face.

“I’m sorry.” Tojo stuttered, “I didn’t mean to ... my name is Tojo.”

“Well. Tojo. Perhaps another time.”

With that she turned and started towards the girl’s locker room. Leaving a dazed Tojo behind. It was Kakashi that brought him out of his trance.

“I got beat by a girl?!?!?”

\* \* \*

“Renda.”

Tojo had been thinking about her, though he was not sure why. The days after their initial meeting had him wondering about this mysterious girl. He was curious as to what she was like. He contemplated her childhood, her family, her likes and dislikes. It was driving him mad. Tojo, having never been in love, did not realize it for what it was, and in the end, adopted a plan common to most young, adolescent youths. He ignored it.

It was about three weeks into the quarter and autumn had persuaded the trees to sleep. He was taking a stroll through the local park to clear the frantic thoughts, floating, looking for potentials to join the official Kendo team representing Japan at the upcoming Junior Olympics in Tokyo, Japan. Kakashi had spent no spare time or thought. He immediately quit school and started training. Tojo was less enthusiastic.

“What am I going to do?” Tojo thought to himself. Now that Kakashi was no longer in school, Tojo felt bereft. His days seemed empty, consisting of sitting through classes, eating lunch alone, and then going home. He sat down against a tree and sighed. He had thought about joining Kakashi. In all honesty they had a good shot at making the team. Better than good. Kakashi had always won the annual citywide tournament year after year with Tojo always a close second.

“But the... where did Renda come from?...” Tojo muttered aloud. He leaned back and looked up at the sky, expecting the tranquil blue of eternity. Instead, Tojo saw long licorice dark hair framing a pair of almond brown eyes. A look of amusement flashed across them.

“Gah!” Tojo scrambled to his feet as Renda nimbly leapt from her perch. “I’m sorry! I didn’t...I wasn’t...” Words tumbled out of Tojo’s mouth, quick as sand and fast as lightning. It would have made Kakashi dizzy.

“Sakara, Hamaru.” Renda asked, her head once again cocked to the side, as if studying him.

“E...excuse me?”

“That’s where I’m from. You said ‘where did Renda come from?’ Didn’t you?” Tojo’s mind froze. The culmination of his feelings and thoughts was too much for him to handle. He looked at the ground, hoping it would hide his quickly reddening face.

“We moved down here just a few months ago,” Renda continued, arms clasped behind her in a ‘matter-of-fact’ manner. “We travel around a lot cause of dad’s job.”

“Oh. What were you doing up in a tree?” Tojo grasped at the chance to change the subject...any subject. “How did you get up there anyway?” Tojo looked up and away from Renda. He hoped his face was returning to a normal color.

“I can fly,” chuckled Renda. Tojo gave her a confused look.

“It was a joke. Ok. Watch.” She took about ten paces back from the tree, and took off at full sprint. Just as woman and tree were about to become one, she jumped and kicked off the base of the trunk. Her momentum carried her upwards, until she grabbed a branch overhead. She looked down with a grin, and hosted herself up. “Come on, Tojo.”

Tojo had less success, failing to even touch the branch until his third try and even managed to scrape his cheek as he struggled onto the bough.

“There you go. That wasn’t so hard was it?” Renda dusted off his back. “It took me a bit of practice when I first started too.”

“So...why do you climb trees anyway? It’s a rather strange thing to do.”

“You know, this the second time we’ve ever spoken, and both times you’ve called me strange. First for me being a girl, and now this. Why is it so strange to you?”

Renda’s eyes bored into Tojo with accusation and Tojo suddenly felt that he was closer to her than he wanted to be.

“No, that’s not what I meant. It’s just... peculiar.” He finished his sentence lamely, not knowing whether he had convinced her. “I was just wondering how your Kendo is so good. Kakashi’s won every tournament in the city since middle school.”

“Hey, where is your friend anyway? I haven’t seen you two apart since I first met you. Did you finally get tired of his arrogant self?”

“No, it’s not like that. He only acts that the way because he knows how good he is.”

“I don’t see you act that way. I can’t understand how you tolerate him.”

“What do you mean? You don’t even know him. He... he saved me once...from a bully named Akuma. It was the first time we ever met. He was the first person who ever talked to me. The first person who ever noticed me     owe him for that.”

“Is that why you hold back when you spar with him?”

Renda’s voice whispered the question. Indeed, it had been one of the reasons why Tojo caught her attention that day.

“And if I do? Would it be strange? You do strange things most people don’t. Don’t you ever feel...out of place? Aren’t you worried about what they say or think about you? I know Kakashi. There isn’t room for two at the top.?”

“Why? Why do you play the sidekick while he throws it in your face?”

“Because I don’t care if I win or lose.”

“Then why do you do Kendo at all?”

Tojo had thought about this question ever since he met Kakashi. He had pondered, reflectred, deconstructed and reconstructed through all the lessons, the tournaments, the days and nights of training. Still, he could reach no answer.

“I don’t know. Maybe because I wanted to be friends with Kakashi, be close to him. I think it started out that way. I went with him once every week, then twice, then three times. After a month, both he and I expected each other every day. We do things in the beginning that we don’t understand, then gradually it becomes a habit, and then habit becomes character. Your life defined before you even realized you’re defining it.”

Tojo slumped, feeling the weight of life more than gravity. Renda looked at him with an eye of concern.

“You’re stranger than me you know, doing Kendo when you don’t even want to.”

“You said I had talent. Should talent go to waste?”

“It *is* going to waste. You just don’t see it.” Renda gave a sigh as she stretched her arms to the sky. It was just getting on to dusk, and the setting sun made the trees burn afire. “My family has moved seven times during my life. You always say I’m strange. Maybe that’s because I’ve never had anything to box me in, to force a definition of who I am. Listen to me, Tojo,” she turned his face to hers. “You don’t owe anyone anything, and you can’t repay them by living your life for them. Your life is something no one can force you to live. They can demand you, they can threaten you. They can bribe you and beat you. In the end, it’s still your choice.”

With that she threw herself backwards into the open air and completed a half somersault to land on her feet. She turned back to Tojo, illuminated in soft golden light as the sun finished its course across the sky.

“Life isn’t defined by a single moment, but by the culmination of choices. You should never think that people are powerless to change their fate. I know you can make your own choices.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you hesitated to cut down your friend. Kendo doesn’t teach that. The way of the warrior is victory, to win no matter if your opponent be father, brother, or God himself. That’s what I noticed about you. That’s what I liked about you.”

Tojo looked down on Renda and saw a grin flash across her face. Then she took off running, waving goodbye. Tojo looked at the reddening sky, so different from the blue he remembered so long ago, and felt the birth-pains of change growing in him.

\* \* \*

The plane landed an hour late.

“Tojo! Over here!” Kakashi rushed over to the arrival gate, equipment bags in hand. “Boy, am I glad to see you. I’ve got all sorts of things to tell you about Tokyo.”

“I know. Renda and I saw you on the TV. You were amazing in the semi-finals.”

“Yeah, but I got my butt handed to me by that guy from Germany. He reminded me of you. He set the same traps and everything. I fell for it both times. You should have been there with me Tojo, you and Renda both.”

“Nah, she hates competing in tournaments just as much as me. We still spar sometimes. Although she’s convinced I always let her win.”

“Some things never change about you, Tojo.”

“Some things do. Come on, Renda’s in the car waiting. Let’s go.”

Kakashi and Tojo headed off, ready to add another story to their lives; the culmination of life an open book before them.

# Tealeaves

Phoebe SIU Lok Yi

I enjoy the warmth  
in a tearoom.

The smell of tea  
your natural perfume.

The taste of tea curls  
curtain of darkness, soar

You and I  
idly in tearoom.

Silence is the love  
We sing.

Memories fade  
The swirl of leaves.

Stars  
Cherry blossom  
Fireworks

transient romances  
lock us in unreality.



## Ancestor Visit

Bill YEUNG Tin Yip

On wheels I go as far as roadways lead.  
On foot I begin from where they end  
Through fameless villages to proceed,  
And unnamed hills to transcend.

On misty hills under gloomy rainy sky,  
The scent of mud and grass fills nostrils mine  
Drives me to open road with sickle by and by,  
To create a path to an old worn shrine.

In the roofless stony shrine resides a marble plaque,  
On which is carved the name of a bygone entity,  
Acquaintance with whom I lack.  
Paired with it is the aged altar of a local deity.

In ancient rites I give them offerings:  
Meat and fruit and wine to have them wooed,  
Prayers and incenses in exchange for blessings.  
Here I feast on spirit-eaten food.

With duties done, now I leave the shrine  
Until drawn back by bloodline.

## Another World

Cherrie CHAN Shuk Mei

Chuen Kee is an exotic grocery in the wet market of Lok Wah Housing Estate. It is not easy for outsiders to locate our store in the hubbub of vending voices. Residents in Lok Wah Estate will tell you that on approaching Cheun Kee, on the left hand side you can first see a Philips 16-inch television with zig-zag lines shuffling across the black and white screen. Uncle Lee still has not fixed it for Mrs Ng and keeps it in his repair shop. When your eyes get used to the zig-zag lines on the TV, your ears detect the interweaving sound of new plastic slippers and patterns at Good-luck shoe shop on the right. Auntie Marie, in her Hakka accent, always complains about housewives slipping their feet from their stinky shoes into her slippers. After toddling around in a catwalk manner, these women remark something like “The slippers are too small” or “The shoes don’t suit my taste? With no intention to purchase anything, they put back the shoes and flee. By now you note an odour of sandalwood lingering in the air, conferring an oriental scent to the modern market inside this public housing estate. It is an exclusive scent for Chuen Kee. We do not sell canned food, salted fish and pickled cucumbers as the usual groceries do. Customers drop by our store and buy afterlife offerings to worship God and pay respects to their ancestors.

Grandfather became paralytic several years ago and is staying at a sanatorium in Sha Tin. Being his only son, father carries on grandfather’s daily work in Chuen Kee. He masters posts such as buyer, accountant and salesman of our store and is devoted to this family business. At five o’clock sharp in the morning, he gets up and goes straight downstairs to the market. In an orderly way he lays out different types of incense on the shelves near the entrance according to their prices. He stacks up the piles of ceremonial paper money and paper clothes for the deceased. By using a long wooden forked stick, he tactfully hangs up the thuribles, eight diagrams (eight-sided mirror), paper Benzi and paper electrical appliances on the raised lever at the entrance. Before opening the store and selling offerings, father orders Auntie Mui, my stepmother, to burn incense and offer fresh fruits to the mantel of Wong Tai Sin. Father keeps reminding my little brother and me that Wong Tai Sin is the holy guardian of Chuen Kee and our world.

“His majesty is almighty and lives high in the sky. He knows everything about what we do and think. So don’t cheat in your English dictation! He will inform me if you indulge in any dishonest behavior in school. But you can pray to him and ask him to endow wisdom on you.”

Each time my brother dares not question my father directly about the might of Wong Tai Sin.

He will pull me aside and put forth his wonders.

“Sister, do you think that he communicates with Wong Tai Sin through letters or IDD phone calls? His majesty lives in the sky. He must be busy listening to people’s calls and avoiding airplanes at the same time?”

Not only is he reverent to God and spirits in the other world, father also pays profound respect to his profession and customers. His outlook presents an image of a courteous and frank salesman of afterlife goods. With hair thoroughly gelled with flower-scented hair oil, it looks smooth and shines like silk. His fringe is blown by his hairdryer to form a small crest waving towards right side. Both Auntie Mui and I agree that he looks like the Astroboy in a Japanese comic book. The black-framed glasses fit his square face and he looks honest in his white checked shirt. The light blue checks on his shirt gradually fade off as Auntie Mui from time to time washes and rubs his shirt hard on the washing board. Though father marks bills in the account book with a Chinese hair pen, he puts a fake golden pen bought from Women’s Street in his shirt pocket. Father thinks that the image of a humble businessman makes Chuen Kee more convincing as “the most trustworthy afterlife goods store in Kwun Tong district”.

My little brother and I rush back to Chuen Kee after school and stay there for the whole afternoon. Auntie Mui has already prepared three main dishes and a bowl of soup for our family - a steamed fish with ginger and Chinese spring onion for father and roasted pork for us kids. During our lunchtime we do not close the door as father welcomes business all the time. Customers with bags of vegetables and meats walk past and yell at us.

“Mui, a bundle of ceremonial candles and paper money please!”

“Hey miss which brand of incense is better? Double-Happiness or Pure White Lotus?”

“Did you hear me that I don’t want a golden thurible but a red one Mrs. Wong?”

Never does father react to customers’ calls at lunch hour. Only Auntie will. In a moderate tone she utters a few words to pacify the grumbling customers and promptly hands over the goods requested by them. Upon finishing the money exchange she resumes her seat, which is at the far end corner of the store stuffed with hills of old newspapers. She goes on raking rice with her chopsticks and puts down her porcelain rice bowl again for another customer’s call.

Nobody can break Auntie's record to make a batch of ceremonial paper shoe-shaped gold for the deceased within ten minutes. When she has received an order of folding paper shoe-shaped gold, she sits on the red plastic square stool and dips her head in the folding task. With her agile fingers gingerly folding and flipping and pressing, she never makes a gold deformed-shape and wastes any paper. Sometimes Chun and I will share her job. "Can't believe you kids can produce good quality shoe-shaped gold!" Father once praised us during the Ching Ming festival when descendants offer sacrifices and mourn for their ancestors. With the extra ceremonial papers, Chun makes airplanes and helmets and I practice Origami making cranes and tortoises. Auntie beams when she sees Chun's airplane crashing against my dinosaur. She looks pretty young with her faint smile and rosy cheeks. After many years Grandma tells me that Auntie is only eight years older than me.

Some of the boys in my class come over to Chuen Kee after school and shoot the paper items hung above the door with rubber bands. They call father "Big ghost" and me "Small ghost" Father's face darkens upon hearing these insulting names and he swipes the rascals off with a chicken feather duster. "If you ran off slow, I would crush your knee caps down! Damn you bastards, damn you in hell!" Whenever this sentence comes out of father's mouth, all the people nearby freeze and the goldfish in the repair shop stops bubbling. One evening Auntie plaits my hair and mumbles, "Living people are afraid of death all the time. Therefore they are scared of approaching all kinds of matter associated with death. Ying, you understand it, don't you?" Yes. I understand. I understand whenever Yuet visits me with her stickers and crayons, and she shields herself from the 16-inch television at the repair shop. I understand that she signals me by blowing three whistles. I understand goose bumps pop up on her skin if she catches a glimpse of the afterlife paper items. "I saw them at my uncle's funeral. They make me feel creepy." Yuet recollects. I understand. I leave our store for a while and play with her at the park nearby.

Lily Marie Kwok (we call her Auntie Marie), a thirty-something Thai- Chinese woman and the shopkeeper of Good-luck shoe shop, has great zeal in mahjong playing. Her inevitable ally, Uncle Lee at the TV repair shop, joins forces with her to play against Mr. and Mrs. Tam at the nearby bedclothes store. Every Friday afternoon they set up the "battlefield" in front of Chuen Kee. Both Uncle Lee and Auntie Marie claim themselves to be "Mahjong King" and "Mahjong Queen" of Lok Wah Estate. I find that they just look like Marco Brothers in Chun's TV game. Auntie Marie has persuaded Auntie Mui over and over again, "Mrs. Wong, let me teach you the skills of mahjong playing. It is easy to learn and quick to master. Why not earn some extra money from the games? My business cannot rely on the little sum of money by selling a few pairs of white canvas shoes and

slippers a day! No! Impossible!” With one hand she pats her fluffy curly hair and relaxes the muscles of her palm and fingers of the other hand. Father feels dizzy with her bloody red fingernail polish and speckles over her earthy-color face. “Too much wine and cigarettes and mahjong” is father’s diagnosis. Auntie Mui nods and keeps smiling to show her courtesy. Mahjong Queen continues her speech, “Your stepdaughter, she only buys a pair of ‘white rice fish’ (another name for white canvas shoes in Cantonese) from me each year! How can I sustain my business and earn my living when business is not so promising? By gambling!”

One afternoon when Auntie Marie and Mrs. Tam keep on chatting about which beauty salon is the best inside the estate, Mrs. Tam unconsciously grabs one more mahjong tile and “Big husband” is the result in that round. Her side of the battlefield is defeated. She owes one thousand Hong Kong dollars to the Queen. I don’t have enough cash at this moment. Can I pay my debt back next Monday? Or you can take away two ‘Dragon and Phoenix cotton quilts’ from my store as a mortgage? Oops I forgot. “A Dragon and Phoenix cotton quilt’ will not suit a single noblewoman like you, Marie. They are for newly married couples? Hearing what Mrs. Tam says, Auntie Marie struggles to squeeze a smile and keeps on sipping the red bean soup prepared by Auntie Mui. Underneath the bulky and colorful make-up on her face, I can feel a weak and dull Queen crouching and shivering as the homeless doggy does in the park outside the wet market.

I sometimes do sympathize with Auntie Marie, but most of time I am scared off by her witchy character. After receiving her one thousand dollars back from Mrs. Tam, Auntie Marie claimed that she sneezed frequently and blinked in an abrupt rhythm. Her conclusion is that a small person (nasty person) must have been maligning her behind her back. Possibly this “small person” is Mrs. Tam who was unreconciled to lose one thousand dollars in the last game. Unwilling to wait till the third day of the third month in the Chinese calendar, which is a traditional Chinese festival for taking vengeance, the Mahjong Queen seeks father’s helps to undergo a custom of “hitting small person” (this means taking revenge secretly behind the back of your enemy). Father feels a bit annoyed to commit the act of “hitting small person” with Auntie Marie, for he does not want to see hatred exist between his two old friends and disturb the harmony in the wet market. But business is business. He sells the incense and paper items to auntie Marie and lets her do whatever she likes.

Step by step, she writes down the name and birth date of Mrs. Tam at the back of a small piece of paper. It has a picture of a Chinese female outlined in green color on the front. The Chinese female symbolizes Mrs. Tam, which is supposed to deliver agony and bad luck to her real self. Next auntie Marie burns the incense and paper money and places a thick piece of fatty pork inside the

mouth of a tiny paper tiger. With one hand auntie Marie presses the paper person hard against the ground, and with the other she hits it stroke by stroke with her high-heeled silvery slipper. “Hit your small head so that you suffocate. Hit your small hand so that you escape from me in a hurry with your slippers still in your hand”. She grins and curses her wicked spell to the small person. All the hatred and insult from Mrs. Tam is released and rebounded. She stops hitting when the paper has completely worn out. Chun and I are astounded and open our eyes wide until Auntie Mui summons us for lunch. Without noticing, a stray dog steals the fatty pork from the paper tiger’s mouth and munches it beside Mrs. Tam. Unable to chew and digest the pork, the dog throws it away. I do not know if the hatred of Auntie Marie towards Mrs. Tam can be resolved or, rather, intensified by “hitting small person” I always recall the evil look of Auntie Marie, and my heart beats faster and faster when I hear the “gick-gock” sound of her silvery slippers.

The scene of pushing and shoving customers inside Lok Wah wet market is rare to see in these years. People are gradually moving out because of the re-establishment of the estate. In a stuffy afternoon, father is folding paper shoe-shaped gold with me. He puts down the paper and fans himself. “Maybe I should learn Tarot and western augury. Chuen Kee is famous in Kwun Tong but not in Diamond Hill. We must think of some new ideas to attract customers to our new store. You know nowadays even people from the older generation do not burn incense and paper money to Wong Tai Sin. Smoke of incense causes air pollution, they say. Not environmental friendly. I’d better seek advice from grandfather.”

# Doubts

Olivia CHAN Nga Yan

In the struggle I'm choked

With doubts in mind.

S...he

Is the one I love?

Will God bless us

Happiness ever after?

When sensitivity defeats morality,

I turn my back to the whole world.

In the struggle I'm choked

With doubts in mind.

# Caprice

Julia CHAN Yuen Chui

*“An ingenious, mature interpretation of Paganini’s Caprice. Brilliant technique. Another child prodigy, comparable to the late Heifertz.”* Sir John Barbirolli, *London Times*.

*“One of the greatest performances of Paganini’s Caprice I have ever heard anywhere in the world.”* David Gwilt, *South China Morning Post*.

It was a hot and humid Hong Kong summer. The skyscrapers melted under the burning sun. The air outside could almost choke you, but who could feel it inside the brand new air-conditioned City Bus?

“Read this Ki-ki, the critics are comparing you to the late Russian violin master Heifertz in the London Times. Wow, Sir John Barbirolli, the famous conductor ... David Gwilt, the Director of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. If I could play half as well as you, I wouldn’t care if I died ten years earlier than I should,” Pui-shan said, while flicking through a bunch of newspapers and magazines.

“Don’t say that Pui-shan, you are also a very talented violinist. If you said that in front of my mum, she would probably give you a good slap on the mouth.” I just did not know how to respond when my peers praised me like this. Pui-shan poked her tongue out and giggled.

“Let’s get off here,” I said, looking at the hotel-like building through the spotless window on the left. The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, where I spent most of my time practising, sweating and making music with my dear violin in the last two years.

Bang. An unbearably loud noise pierced my ears. Having not even had the time to see what happened, the bus crashed into the fence beside the road and began to fall over. Everything was falling to the left. Chairs, fluorescent tubes, bags, books, papers, my violin! The window broke and glass scattered all over the burning hot surface of the road. The whole bus began to heat up in the sun.

“Please help me...” I murmured in a faint voice, “Please... take that chair away.” I couldn’t move. My left arm was on fire. I could see the small rainbows created by the reflection of the



broken glass underneath my arm and the chair on top of it, but couldn't feel the pain. The load on top of my arm was killing me. I couldn't breathe with the heat, the exhaust from the cars passing by and the polluted air. The skyscrapers around me began to spin, like a carousel.

\* \* \*

“The winner of the 45th Hong Kong Schools Music Festival, class 112, junior violin solo, is ...” My heart was racing. A voice was ringing in my head. Lam Ki-ki, Lam Ki-ki, Lam Ki-ki.

“Entry no.23, Lam Ki-ki!”

That was the proudest moment of my life. I stepped onto the stage, shook hands with the adjudicator and received my certificate. I was wearing the blue velvet dress my mother had made for me the day before the competition. The two ponytails on my head dangled back and forth. I was the happiest eight- year-old girl in the world.

\* \* \*

“The winner of the 46th Hong Kong Schools Music Festival, class 128, intermediate violin solo, is ... Lam Ki-ki!”

\* \* \*

“And now, the winner of the 48th Hong Kong Schools Music Festival, class 220, advanced violin solo. Lam Ki-ki!”

\* \* \*

“The most prestigious award of the year, the gold medal winner of the 52nd Hong Kong Schools Music Festival is ... Lam Ki-ki!”

\* \* \*

Winning the Hong Kong Schools Music Festival became a yearly routine. It was nothing but a collection of certificates. The moment I stepped onto the stage, I knew that I was going to win,

every competition, every year. I was aiming for more than these childish games. I wanted to be a concert violinist. I wanted to win international competitions. I wanted to be famous and perform all over the world.

And I did.

\* \* \*

The day of the release of the HKCEE results was the saddest moment of my life. Not because I did not do well, but because I did too well. Papa was really satisfied with my results, and my whole family: Papa, Mami, my three brothers and sister went out to eat lobster at the Chinese restaurant near to where we lived.

As usual, my brothers were arguing over a minute matter. Mami slapped one of my younger brothers on his face, and they began to cry.

“Stop it!” Papa shouted. But they cried and screamed even louder. Papa slapped both of them and finally they stopped crying. The families at the other tables stared at us. So did the waiters and waitresses.

I hated going out with my family. I was so ashamed of them. When the crying and screaming were finally over, I took a deep breath and began to talk.

“Papa, I got a full scholarship to study at the Academy for Performing Arts, majoring in violin performance.”

Everyone went silent. Papa continued to eat.

“Papa, I really love playing violin, I don’t want to waste my time doing A-Levels. I’ve spent too much of my practice time studying for HKCEE already. I want to be a concert violinist!” I said with a determined voice.

Papa banged the table with his chopsticks. Everyone stopped eating.

“Playing violin is just for fun. I want all my children to study at university. You know how

lucky you are? Going to school and studying are the only things you have to. When I was your age, I had to take care of my younger brothers and sisters, and work on the farm after school. I wanted to study at university but never had a chance. I warn you, you are not going to study something useless. I want you to be a lawyer or a businesswoman, not a stupid fiddler playing music on the street.” He was barking like a mad dog. Everyone in the restaurant was looking at us.

Tears ran down my cheek. I ran home, shut myself in my room and played Paganini’s Caprice. I couldn’t stop. I played and played, until I was absolutely exhausted and collapsed onto my bed.

\* \* \*

“Hello Professor Wong, it’s Ki-ki,” I croaked over the telephone.

“Hello Ki-ki, I’ve heard of your accident, how’s your hand?”

“Pretty bad, I don’t think I can have lessons in the next three months.”

“But you have a concert with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra in three weeks,” he exclaimed. “The posters are everywhere already! Are you sure you want to cancel it?”

“I don’t think I have a choice.”

“Don’t give up, Ki-ki, you’ll be fine in no time. By the way, the director of the Berliner Philharmoniker called me yesterday. They’re inviting you to be the soloist for Paganini’s first concerto in the Hong Kong Arts Festival. What do you think?”

Berliner Philharmoniker, Paganini’s first concerto, could any violinist in the world refuse such an offer?

\* \* \*

“Lam Ki-ki, four hundred for the medicine, including anti-depressants and sleeping pills, five hundred for physiotherapy and another three hundred for the X-ray. All together, one thousand two hundred dollars please.” The receptionists at Dr. Lo’s orthopaedic clinic needed to be very

gifted mathematicians.

I had been a frequent visitor to this miserable place for a month. Every person, every single object looked miserable here. Worn out old magazines, posters, flowers, books, a couch, a tea table, a telephone, certificates and mirrors all cramped together in such a small, brown and orange coloured room. If they charged this much for every patient, renting a bigger place with a more comfortable lounge shouldn't be a big problem.

I never had any problems with western medicine. When I was a child, I had asthma and had to visit my family doctor, Dr. Yau, all the time. Under his care and supervision, I recovered fully when I was twelve. He worked for the government though.

“Physiotherapy costs only two hundred and fifty, why is it five hundred?” I said, looking at the bill.

“Two hundred and fifty for one shoulder only. It costs another two hundred and fifty for your arm. You said your arm was sore.” The nurse said, with her eyes staring at my wallet.

I paid the bill and left without saying another word.

\* \* \*

Kowloon Junior School  
1 Jordan Road  
Kowloon, Hong Kong

Dear Miss Lam Ki-ki,

Suspension Of Violin Classes D, E, F

*We are sorry to inform you that we are going to suspend the three violin classes taught by you. We have heard about your hand injury and also received some complaints from parents, saying that you cannot demonstrate the violin pieces in class. Hence we feel your injury will affect their children's learning.*

*We sincerely hope that you will get well soon. Please contact us when you are ready to take up the teaching job again.*

*Best Wishes,  
Mary Lau  
Headmistress*

“How am I going to pay for my medical treatments? Teaching violin is the only way I can earn money. What can I do? What can I do?” A faint voice muttered in my head.

\* \* \*

“Ki-ki, your phone is ringing. What ringtone is that? So annoying!” Mami shouted from the kitchen.

I had set my ringtone to Paganini’s Caprice. To my family, everything which had to do with the violin was annoying.

“Hello, Ki-ki,” I recognised his voice instantly. It was Professor Wong.

“How’s your hand? I’ve heard that there hasn’t been much progress with the orthopaedics.”

“Well, not so good,” I sighed.

“My colleague from the Philharmonic said Chinese medicine and acupuncture are better at dealing with this kind of injury. He had tendonitis before, and after visiting this acupuncturist for three months, he recovered completely.”

“Really?” I exclaimed. A sense of hope shuffled through my body.

“Yeah, I can give you the telephone number and address of the acupuncturist. His clinic’s in Central, very close to the Academy.”

“Thanks Professor Wong.” I smiled for the first time since the accident last month.

\* \* \*

It was a five-minute walk from the Central MTR station to the acupuncture clinic. The road was steep and narrow, and crowded with people going home from work. The clinic was right next to Lan Kwai Fong, the famous street in Hong Kong where expatriates went for a pint of Guinness after a day of hard work.

I took the lift to the 13th floor. When the lift door opened, there was a distinct smell of Chinese medical oil. The clinic was the only business there. On the door, it said “Blessing Acupuncture Therapy” I rang the doorbell. A tall, thin, middle-aged man came to the door.

“Please come in and have a seat. I’ll be right back.” He said with an exceptionally high voice that I would describe as castrato. The smell became a mixture of Cologne and Chinese medical oil.

He had thin grey hair and small eyes, with a pair of glasses hanging in front of them, which made them look even smaller. He wore a short-sleeved white T-shirt that showed his muscular arms and big strong hands, a pair of grey trousers, a black belt and a pair of well-polished shoes. I could tell that they were all expensive brands.

I had never seen an acupuncturist in the last nineteen years of my life. I did not know what an acupuncturist was supposed to look like. The used needles on the tray made me shiver.

“Your right shoulder will be sore. It’s just muscle pain and will disappear in a few days.” He said to a slightly overweight woman in her fifties who looked like she was suffering from the pain already.

“How many treatments do I need?” she looked worried when she asked.

“Normally it’s a twelve-treatment cycle. If you still haven’t recovered after a cycle, then you would probably need to do another one. You could do up to three treatments a week. The more you do, the faster you’ll recover.” He said confidently, in his high voice.

His small eyes followed the woman’s hand when she took four hundred Hong Kong dollars out of her purse and put it on the table.

“Thank you Lam *yisi*<sup>1</sup>. I’ll come again on Wednesday evening. Do I have to make an appointment?” She asked.

“You are welcome. I have ten patients on Wednesday already. What about Thursday?” He said with a broad smile.

The woman wrote it down in her schedule and left.

“Good evening, Lam *yisi*. My name is Lam Ki-ki. Mr. Ho, the violinist from the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra recommended you to me. I am also a violinist.” I said while he was shaking hands with me.

“Great. I love listening to classical music. So what can I do for you?” He said with his broad smile.

I explained the accident to him, and what the western doctors had done. He seemed quite interested in what the specialists did to me.

“Miss Lam, I am not saying that western medicine is not good. However, there’s something that they can’t really do. For example, treating injuries. With my treatment, I’m sure you’ll be playing the violin again within a cycle, that’s twelve treatments.” His voice was so high and confident that it hurt my ears.

Forty-eight treatments were over. I was still going to his place every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Every visit cost me four hundred Hong Kong dollars. I was totally broke after three months

\* \* \*

Three months had passed. The Academy for Performing Arts looked exactly the same. Concert halls, practice rooms, classrooms, canteens, professors, students, staffs... everyone looked the same. However I felt as though I didn’t belong to this place anymore.

“Hahaha, yeah, you know how bad she played at the lunchtime concert last month? I almost laughed my head off at the concert hall.” Pui-shan’s voice was audible from two floors below.

Sometimes I wondered why she didn't major in opera singing. She had such a powerful voice.

"Of course she's not going to play with the Berliner Philharmoniker. She's finished. There's no way that she can play Paganini again. Our chance has come. Since she entered the Academy, she won all the prizes and performed with all the world famous orchestras that came to Hong Kong. It's our turn to be the stars of the Academy." Pui-shan was singing her words out like an opera aria.

Everyone went silent when I walked past the canteen. People used to come and talk to me all the time. Even people who were total strangers to me had always smiled when they saw me. After the accident, whenever someone walked past me, they just gossiped behind my back.

People could do whatever they liked. I just couldn't believe my best friend since primary school, Pui-shan, would say something like that.

\* \* \*

It was my father's birthday. As usual, my whole family went out to eat lobster at the Chinese restaurant nearby where we lived.

Everyone dressed up for my father's birthday. I was just wearing a T-shirt and a pair of jeans.

"Look at yourself in the mirror, you look like a ghost. How old are you? Don't you know how to make yourself look like a human being? It's your father's birthday. You pay no respect to your parents. I don't know what I did wrong to have a stupid daughter like you." My mother's voice was like smashed glass to my ears.

I lost ten pounds in the last three months. I looked terrible. The dark circles around my eyes were getting darker and darker.

"Leave her alone. She never listens to us. Look at her now, this is the price you have to pay for not listening to your parents," my dad said.

"If she listened to me and went on doing A-Levels, she would be a happy girl studying at



university right now. She ruined her own life. She doesn't deserve our sympathy. I wish she were never born, such a waste of my time and money!"

I ran out of the restaurant, screaming and crying my eyes out, tearing shreds of hair out of my head and kicking the tables and chairs on my way out. I ran all the way home and locked myself in my room once again. I put on a CD of my own recording of Paganini's Caprice and turned the volume on full. In a fit of desperation, I swallowed all the medications I had in my room, and collapsed onto my bed.

My head began to swim. Memory came flooding back like bubbles rising to the surface in a sea of music. A happy eight- year-old ascending the stage, sweating and making music with my dear violin, the release of the HKCEE results, my dad's chopsticks hitting the table, the bus crashing, the shattered glass, the months of treatment, Pui-shan's gossip, all the harsh criticism weighing down on me. Paganini's Caprice reached its final crescendo. The pain would finally end.

1. Chinese medical practitioners are called Yisi in Cantonese.

# See, The King is Counting His Golden Rings

Ken KAN Man Fai

See, the king is counting his golden rings,  
And here mothers are dropping changelings too.  
In this country people don't have a spring,  
But they do not dare to say it is true.

Stealing a baby is not difficult,  
Coz there's no law or order in this place.  
People can only put babies in the vault,  
Or after the stealer they'd have to chase.

Only to the golden rings the king clings,  
People's lives are wasteable to his mind.  
Underneath their bare feet people feel stings,  
How can this country's king be so unkind?



# TITLE

Ken KAN Man Fai

My mom always says I am a bummer  
Because I did nothing in the summer  
While my brother is holding a hammer  
Repairing mom's favorite car's plumber

She also says I'd better be a beggar  
For I can never be the first comer.  
But I did enjoy the long midsummer  
In which I learnt to be a big dreamer.

# A Moment

Matthew LIU Lei

I lifted my head from the pillow  
the room was still and quiet  
I heard an unfamiliar sound  
from outside in the distance.

it crept up like the beacon of day  
before making itself known,  
by the time I knew its footsteps  
they'd left - and I was alone ...

Red, Red, Red. Nothing is on the street but red - bloody red. CHOI!<sup>1</sup> I shouldn't say something so unlucky, "bright cheerful red" is a better description. Yes, it is the Chinese New Year again.

Our family is not really traditional. We never clean up our flat from ceiling to floor as we should according to the Chinese custom, when it is two days before the New Year. Perhaps because of this not-sticking to our ancestor's advice, our home is becoming messier and messier each year. This year, we finally cannot bear the mess we are living in. Mum forces us to "purify" our rooms, and also to check over all the stuff in the cabinets and under the beds, throw away all the "useless old rubbish" we (I insist that they were my dad and my sister) have been unwilling to discard all these years. My mum enjoys teasing us by equating us with the old lady living next-door who keeps every useless thing in tins and boxes. Anyway, I am now made to grab a rubbish bag, the biggest kind, with an enormous "DISPOSABLE" brutally written on it by my mother. Tell you what, I hate the way my father and sister manipulate my share of the place to keep what they claim are their "valuable memories". I just can't understand them. Who cares about an old watch, or a broken Polaroid camera?

I have to get on my feet right away and start the great cleaning crusade.

What should I begin with? Fff! Ok! You are the lucky first, my neglected cabinet. I haven't touched you for a long time.

Let me see... well... yuck... this filthy shoe lace! Why didn't someone throw it away earlier? What the heck do you keep it for! DISPOSIBLE.

A key -- should be a key for some sort of silly fancy little box... um... what's the value of your existence without the box you can open? DISPOSIBLE.

What's next... Oh! This jacket is really a classic! I bet after another four to five years I will still remember clearly the day Dad brought this jacket home.

‘Come on Pa! You aren’t asking me to wear this!’ I looked at the Jacket with a Snoopy, which couldn’t be any bigger, in the middle front on a sharp red background which couldn’t be any redder. ‘Bought from Sogo! It’s an expensive thing! Now half-priced!’ Pa sounded surprised at my not-thrilled response. ‘But it is Snoopy, plus, it is red -- a perfectly sharp red... P~a~a~’ I softened my voice and pleaded like a little girl, you know, it always kills men. When I imagined how Pa squeezed into the crowd of “Si Lai”<sup>2</sup> who scooped in the mountains of clumsy half-price clothes like they were for free, I had to tighten my lips to stop myself from bursting into laughter. Pa said with a persuasive tone (which was not very persuasive to me), ‘You’ll regret it when you get older. Blue, black, grey... All your clothes are like an old woman’s.’

‘No. I won’t’, I said firmly, ‘I don’t want to look like a red packet in New Year<sup>3</sup>’. I did wear this jacket, just to please dad, when I was at home. I thought this is the smartest method to please him and at the same time not torture myself.

\* \* \*

Hm... this jacket is really intimate to me, but one thing I still cannot understand -- how could my father suppose this kind of ‘cutie-cutie’ jacket would suit an ‘in’<sup>4</sup>16-year-old girl like me!

Hey! Hey! Hey! Let’s see how they react when they see me wear this Snoopy again.

Ah – God... I got so much fatter in these few years... alright.

“Hello everyone!”

“Where did you get this tiny jacket? I’ve never seen you wear it. Look like a ‘zhong’ going to burst. Doesn’t suit you anymore.”

“Your husband bought it!”

“Of course. Bought from Sogo. So nice a Jacket. It’s different from those fake ones sold in Woman Street. It’s made in Japan. It must be written on the label. You go to Seiyu to see how much Keroppe or Garfield clothes cost and you’ll know.”

“Man! Keroppe is so out-dated! And, Garfield is not from Japan.”

“What a waste... only worn at home, like it’s a shame to you... If I had known you’re going to waste it altogether, I would have better saved my energy and eaten the two hundred away! Waste.”

“Give me a break! Do you need to grumble on this matter for so many years! I am just wasting my breath to talk to you! Looking at the old stuff is better than to talk to you.”

This mean dad! Ai!

What’s the use of letting it lie in the cabinet until next time we clean up again? DISPOSIBLE.

Now.... A box. ... What would be inside? Oh! Who’s this? I can’t believe it. It must be dad. Ah he looks quite the same as before. No, indeed not quite the same, except his nose which is crooked in the same way. Dad is qualified to be called ‘thin’ now. His hair doesn’t keep him company. But look here! Dad’s standing victoriously beside a canoe, one hand holding a paddle another rest at his waist. He hasn’t mentioned that he was once a rowing team member. I have almost forgotten I once thought dad was so big and strong when I was only up to his tummy.

\* \* \*

“Daddy it’s my turn,” I yelled. Dad then put down my sister who was complaining that her turn was too short, and raised me up with his powerful arms to the level of his chest. He then called out “One, Two and THREE”. In no time I was in the air, enjoying the suffering of the instant fear by gravity. And then I was safely landed in dad’s arms again. I giggled excitedly.

Mum groused at Dad with a frown, “Are you crazy? That’s too dangerous!”

“This is easier than to borrow a fire<sup>6</sup> for me. See your frown! You can squash a mosquito to death with it.” Dad apparently enjoyed his service to us, and we of course were the biggest beneficiaries.

\* \* \*

This is the first photo of the young dad I have ever seen. Indeed my Dad is always the

producer of photographs rather than the subject in them. I think that he has an abnormally profound enthusiasm in taking photos of us, but frankly I don't have much appreciation of his contribution as a camera man.

\* \* \*

“Now let's welcome our G.6 class! Let's see what they've learnt this year.” The MC's announcement was followed by the loud claps from excited parents, among which my father was the most hysterical one. It was the annual promotion ceremony of the ballet school where I learnt ballet. Not a big function, it took place in a dancing studio in the Shatin Town Hall. Parents were squeezed at one end of the studio.

Seeing us standing neatly in lines, my teacher instructed us to dance the first exercise, “Port de bras A. Prepare.” Music started to play. Coordinating with the flow of the music, my head movement followed my arms towards the centre, and then I saw my dad, and his camera. He was the only one standing in the very front of the audience, carrying a big camera with long lens, trying out different angles to make the best shot. Although I know nothing about cameras, it was obviously a quite “serious” one. He looked as if he was the authoritative camera man.

“Can't you be a bit more low-profile? It's not a big performance; I am not the solo dancer. And all other parents are just sitting and watching. Please don't make me look ridiculous.” I felt ashamed of Dad's exaggerated actions. I lifted my already lifted face a bit more along with the music, turning my eyes to another angle. I made every effort to avoid my eyes catching his.

At the end of the ceremony, parents were invited to come to the centre to dance cha-cha with their children. Parents of many five-or-six-year-old children happily came out, hugging their girls and praising them. My classmates started to move to a corner, they are laughing and making fun. Some of their parents told them where and when to meet afterwards and then left. Some didn't even come, because it was really a small function. Dad was craning his neck to search for me in the middle of the crowd, wanting to get my signal to invite him to dance. How could I explain to him that I despise dancing with him? I pretended not to see him and occupied myself with my classmates' chit-chat, feeling guilty inside. But when I turned my head to peep, he was still there; and at the same moment he caught my eye. His mouth made a voiceless “Dance?” while his eyes directed to the centre of the classroom. I frowned and shook my head embarrassingly. Dad showed a bitter smile, made a telephone gesture besides his ear, and turned around. He walked away,



lowering his head to pack his camera and the light back in his camera kit.

\* \* \*

I stopped learning ballet a few years ago. I miss the elegance and the joviality in the old days whenever I put on my leotard and tights, and spread my emotional arms and legs. I wish I could have more records of my memory. I regret being unwilling to be pictured by dad.

I also regret I didn't dance with dad in the annual promotion ceremony. I haven't danced with dad once, not even to hold his hand once after that day.

\* \* \*

One Christmas night, we held a tiny Christmas party at home. "Ar Mui<sup>7</sup>, I teach you how to dance Cha-cha." My father said while he turned down the light and played a CD. It was the familiar cha-cha music in the advertisement of a famous brand of tummy-ache-relieve pills. My little feet rested comfortably on his big feet. My hands were so securely surrounded in his warm ones. My head rested on his muscular abdomen. Our steps were then as united as any of the best dancers. Following the rhythm we moved around the tiny area inside our flat. My dress swung and the soft laces caressed my legs gently while we danced. He told me how he and his friends used to have dancing parties when they were students. I listened and fancied excitedly what it was like when dad wore a school uniform. But dad was the more fascinated one. Every time when he poured out piece by piece of his childhood, he would never stop.

\* \* \*

For me, the future was always more stirring. My sister and I used to "rehearse" how we are going to put on the Miss Hong Kong gown and the glittering diamond crown when we grew up. We never became Miss Hong Kong. For the reason we would have to trace back to Dad's and Mum's genes. Anyway, now we are somehow a bit too "old" to have any chance to be Miss Hong Kong. I did become a friend of last year's Miss Hong Kong even though I am not one myself. It was really amazing to see an old classmate on TV; her image to me was still the messy little girl who sneezed all day long with the thing from her nose smeared over her hands and sleeves.

Time really flies.

Every once in a while I would sneak into Mum's room, wear her oversized high heels, stuffing the gaps between my toes and the shoes with tissue paper. And I thought her skirt fitted me well when I pulled the waist up above my chest. I always longed to become a young lady.

Now I am. I find that wearing skirts and high heels is not fun; somehow it's kind of old-fashioned. We all wear sneakers and different styles of jeans.

Things were changing.

Not knowing when it started, I enjoyed buying my own clothes. The Red Snoopy Jacket seemed to be the last piece of clothing Dad bought me. And my mum, I didn't go shopping with her since she enveloped a bra on my body over my clothes, ignoring all the shoppers around. Later, another change occurred. My hatred to taking photos magically switched to a kind of fondness. I requested a digital camera as my birthday present from Dad and Mum. I love taking photos with my friends.

A few hours ago, I've just discovered that it's not only me; dad has also changed.

\* \* \*

"Papa, do you still want these 'Camera World'?" I asked as my hands were busy exploring this and that in the book shelf.

"Ai..... these..." he hesitated a while, "throw them away if you like."

"Why don't you take photos now?" I flipped across the pages of one of his "Camera World."

"I don't know. Perhaps... now... can't find anything worth taking a photo of."

\* \* \*

He was so enthusiastic in taking photos of us before, now he said there is nothing he can take a photo of... why?

“I was dancing with my darling, in the Tennessee Waltz... la la la la la.”

Ah, this is something in which dad remains the same. He loves to fill the house with music, and he likes to sing along while he is doing other things. This music is stirring up my memory of that Christmas dance even more. But I'm now too heavy to dance on Dad's feet. Especially after Dad gets thinner and thinner since his inherited diabetes began to have an effect on him, I almost feel that I seem heavier than him.

A stream of coldness and hollowness stab my heart suddenly. I am scared. I am lost. I feel like I'm losing something, forever.

“Ma... wait! Wait !!.....”

“What? Come. Help me to hold the door. I throw these two bags away.”

“Wait, I want to take something back.”

“So troublesome! I've just packed them up!”

“Please.” Under the milky white plastic rubbish bag, the red is still so eye-catching. I seize it and pull it out of the bag of mess.

“Why get it back? You never appreciate it.”

“Just that I haven't discovered its beauty before.”

“What? You didn't discover its beauty when it is in its newest and most glamorous state; you discover it's beautiful now that it's old and shabby! What a weird daughter I have!”

“Never mind, New Year is a time for red”, I smiled with satisfaction.

\* \* \*

Everywhere on the street there is laughter and beautiful red decorations. Walking on the street in my red Snoopy jacket, its tightness gives me the warmth of being hugged. I am a part of the

red.

When we walk past my favorite fancy little shop stuffed with Japanese photo-sticker-machines, I said, “Pa, Let’s try this! “

“No, it’s for young people only...” Dad embarrassedly waves his hand.

“No Pa. It’s for someone who loves to be in a photo, and also someone who always sacrifices himself to be the camera man,” I said.

“In this Red Snoopy Jacket?” Pa sarcastically points at me when we’re ready for the shot. “Look silly! Like a Red Packet!”

“No! It’s an expensive thing from Japan!” I laughed.

Red is happiness, red is love, red is a new beginning.

1 Chinese exclamation for something unlucky. Usually uttered by older generation women.

2 Middle-aged housewife who always gossips and who seldom misses any big sales.

3 A small red envelop carrying money which Chinese parents give to youngsters in Lunar New Year.

4 Very fashionable and up-to-date.

5 Chinese traditional food. Made of sticky rice tightly bounded in a few pieces of leaves.

6 Cantonese slang meaning something is very easy; similar to “piece of cake”; less used by younger generation.

7 Younger sister. In Hong Kong, a family member is sometimes called by their family role rather than his/her name.

# Freedom Acrostic

Vina LEUNG Ka Ling

Fly to space, leave the race  
Rest in peace, live in ease.  
Endless burden, will soon be forsaken  
Eternal harmony, fulfill your journey.  
Death is no fear. Quick! Dry up thy tear  
On the road to freedom, grasp this wisdom  
'Master our lives, before Freedom arrives.'

## Two Faces

Yonnie WONG

Dear Lady Bai,

How are you? It is my first time to write to you. I have read my mother's *Sister* magazine and found your Q&A section interesting. I have some problems in my family and school life, so I send you a letter and hope that you can help me.

I am a Chinese immigrant from Beijing. I am a Form One student in a Band 3 secondary school. My Cantonese is poor and I am still struggling with it. Every time when I speak in front of the class as requested by the teacher, my classmates burst into laughter and chatter -- some of them giggle, some call me *Mainlander* or *Madam North* loudly, some even throw rubbish at me. No body can stop them, not even the teacher. Those who do not join them look at me sympathetically. During recess, feeling bored or so, they encircle me, make fun of my Cantonese and nag at my looks; old fashioned, they say, sometimes even speak filth. I make no reply, fearing the words I speak would just be things for them to laugh at. And I have no friends in school; those silent ones are just classmates. Kind enough, they will walk away from me as soon as others find us chatting, simply hoping not to be boycotted. In front of the class, I can do nothing but keep lowering my head, wishing there was a hole for me to hide in. I want to get away from them; I want revenge, to scold and laugh at them back, but I cannot! I am so afraid...

Worse still, I get no comfort nor consolation from my family. I used to think that as an only daughter, I would become the center of my parents' love and care. My parents work all day long. I have dinner alone every night. On the table there is only a memo or some money they left. If I need them to sign my school notice, I just put it on the table and I will get it signed the next day. They have never cared about me!

Recently, my parents are planning to divorce. I knew that one night as I woke up and heard them fighting in the living room, arguing over financial issues and my father's extra-martial affairs. I did not know what was going on actually but I was frightened as I heard my mother whimpering and whining to my father. I cried and huddled myself in the corner of my bed. I wanted to stop their quarrel; I did not want them to divorce but what could I do?

I am really upset with all these things and I don't know what to do. Would you help me?

Please do reply when you are free. Bye!

Yours sincerely,  
Lee Wing Yee

P.S. Would you mind being a friend of mine? I need a friend who can support me!

\* \* \*

Dear Wing Yee,

Thanks for reading *Sister* and your letter. I am glad that you treat me as a friend and of course, it would be my pleasure to be your friend.

I know that your classmates treat you badly. I think you can tell your teachers about their behavior. They will punish them for you. But, I think it is also important to protect yourself against those classmates. Shout back when they laugh at you! They will not dare to tease you if they find that you are fiercer than they are. They may rush to ask you to make friends with them and treat you as their leader. Believe me! Speak up for yourself.

As for your family, I think these are common problems in Hong Kong. I understand your difficulties as I had a similar experience when I was young. Divorce, to old couples, may only be a term to threaten each other in order to win or to stop the argument. They just talk about divorce but they won't take action. So, don't worry. Pick up your courage to talk to them and tell them what you expect and want from them. Shout and cry in front of them if they quarrel again. They must notice you!

Don't keep grumbling, Wing Yee! Do something to change the situation. I am always here to support and listen to you. I look forward to your reply to tell me if you can do so.

Yours sincerely,  
Lady Bai

\* \* \*

23/9/2003 (Mon)

I am very happy today as I received Lady Bai's letter today. I am surprised that she replied so quickly. I just sent it last Tuesday and I received it within a week. What makes me more excited is that she said she would like to be my friend! I have never thought of having a friend like Lady Bai, comforting and supportive. I am really ecstatic.

I am glad that Lady Bai has similar ideas to my own, to speak up for myself and shout at my classmates and parents. I have thought of it before. Although it seems to be rude to do so, I think Lady Bai must be right as she is more experienced than me.

But it's strange when I looked at the envelope of the letter of Lady Bai. There is no address on it! How can she mail the letter to me? I also found a letter to Lady Bai in the mailbox too. Does Mom also write to her? It's weird.

\* \* \*

Dear Lady Bai,

Are you busy recently? Thanks for your reply. I am so excited to receive your letter. I have tried my best to do what you have taught me, but still, the problems persist and they are even worse.

In school, I tried to speak up for myself. But, when I shouted back at them, they just laughed even louder; she's infuriated, they exclaimed, some even said that I had gone insane. I told them that I would tell the teacher about their bullying me. They threatened that they would beat me up if I really did so. One of them even slapped me on my face! They seized my purse and took away all my money. They said it's compensation to them for my rudeness. I felt so helpless and hurt. I became even more afraid of my classmates.

And there is nothing good in my family either. I left a letter to my mother telling her what I was thinking. What I wanted was care and comfort. When I woke up the next morning, I found on the table not a word, but only money, much more than I usually get. Did she think that I was only asking for money? No... She has never understood me.

My parents have decided to divorce finally. I knew it through the memo my mother left me.



She asked me to live with her after they are separated. I couldn't help but just keep crying in the gloomy house, until my eyes were swollen. Did they ever think of me when they made the decision? I doubt it! How can they do that to me?

I am feeling desperate now. It seems that I have no hope in either my school or family. Please help me, Lady Bai! I think you are the only one who can help me. I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,  
Wing Yee

\* \* \*

28/9/2003 (Sun)

Writing to Lady Bai and waiting for her reply seem to be the only happinesses in my life. I have sent a letter to her on Thursday and I really look forward to her reply. Hm... when will I receive her letter this time?

Today, I stayed at home with Mom for the whole day. We have talked a lot, about her divorce, about our life after their separation, about me. There were many things to talk about as we haven't talked to each other since last Chinese Lunar New Year holiday.

I told her about my miserable school life. She said not a word to comfort me but just smiled and asked me to report to the teacher. "Take it easy, they are only joking" was her conclusion. She couldn't help me! She utterly didn't understand the situation! I knew that she might think that was only childish stuff and wasn't worth any concern. Maybe Lady Bai is the only one that can understand me. I did not tell Mom about her; I knew she would laugh at me!

She said she was fired by her boss and would have more time to accompany and take care of me. I was delighted! She told me that we would stay in the house after the separation and Pa would live with his mistress in China. I might not see Pa again after that. I wailed. Ma just sat there silently and patted on my shoulders. She seemed to be emotionless. Did she feel sad for her divorce? Why did she not say a word to comfort me? Did she care about me? I was puzzled.

Today I found another letter to Lady Bai in the mailbox too. I think it must be Mom's. Maybe she wrote the address wrongly. I put it on Mom's table and I told her that's not mine. She then kept the letter. Maybe she's too shy to admit that she is writing to Lady Bai. Ha... it's interesting! Would Lady Bai find out that she is my mother?

\* \* \*

Dear Wing Yee,

Do you feel better now? Being bullied and facing the fact of your parents' divorce are not easy for you. But I am a bit sad that you didn't talk about me with your mother. Are you ashamed to have a friend like me?

In your school, I think the only method left is to hit them and fight back. It is humiliating to be slapped and robbed without trying protect yourself. You should slap them back or fight against them next time when they are rude to you. Though it is a bit brusque to do so, there is no other way! If you are willing to reconcile with them, you can keep silent, and continue to be bullied by them.

I understand the situation in your family. Your parents have decided everything for the family and you. To be frank, you can do nothing, not even speak a word! They may be troubled a lot by their jobs and the divorce. You seem to be a burden to them. So, keep quiet and don't request more from them.

If you are still not satisfied with my suggestions, I have thought of an excellent method for you. It can solve all the problems completely. Your classmates dislike and bully you, you are a troublemaker to the teachers and a burden to your parents. Why don't you just die? To commit suicide may be the best choice for you. You can have peace in your heart. When you are dead, you know nothing about hurt, pain, desperation or puzzlement. Your death is also good to the people around you! Your classmates will be relieved to have no eyesore in the class, the teachers will be relaxed as they need not to spend time to handle your problems, your parents can concentrate on their work and have fewer burdens. See? Your death does contribute!

I have made my suggestion for you. It is now your turn to make your choice. Think carefully about what I have said. I hope I can receive your letter soon.

Yours sincerely,  
Lady Bai

\* \* \*

1/10/2003 (Wed)

Today I have received Lady Bai's letter again! I hurried to open and read it. She gave me some suggestions. To fight or die? Both are difficult for me! I have really thought of these suggestions. Maybe to die is easier for me. I agree with Lady Bai that I am a burden to my parents and my classmates and teachers. I have also thought of committing suicide before but I think there may be alternatives. Now, to commit suicide seems to be the only method left, though, I ... I still need time to think about it.

And, one thing is special in the letter. How does Lady Bai know that I had not mentioned her in front of Ma? Have I told her in the last letter? I have forgotten and I am confused. Or, does she notice and deduce this from my letter? Oh... I really like Lady Bai, she is such an attentive and assertive woman.

Today Mom asked me if I knew who Lady Bai is. So, I told her that I always write to her. And I told Mom I found Lady Bai's Q&A section in her Sister magazine. Mom's face turned pale and she looked confused. I did not know what was happening and she then turned back to her room. Why are there so many strange things recently?

\* \* \*

Mrs Lee was stunned when she read the letters, the letters that were found in the mailbox yesterday and last Sunday. Not until she finished reading them did she finally understand that her daughter was seriously pestered by her classmates and family. She was worried about Wing Yee. She remembered that Wing Yee had once told her about her vulgar classmates. She thought that they were just joking with her daughter and they were nothing special. Mrs. Lee believed Wing Yee was old enough to deal with all these things. In Mainland China, Wing Yee had a lot of friends and she looked forward to going to school every day. Mrs. Lee could never imagine that going to school became torture to Wing Yee. She felt sorry for her only daughter, and she felt sorry that she failed to understand and help when Wing Yee was disturbed.

But... who was Lady Bai? The *Sister* magazine had stopped being published for long time. And, of course the Q&A section of Lady Bai was closed. That's why the letters to Lady Bai were sent back to their mailbox according to the return address written on the envelopes.

After all, *who was Lady Bai?*

Hey, wait a minute... there must be replies from Lady Bai.

So, Mrs. Lee entered Wing Yee's room when she was at school. Mrs. Lee searched for Lady Bai's replies and found them in a drawer. She opened the envelopes and read the letters. Her heart beat faster and harder than ever. She opened her mouth wide when she found that letters from Lady Bai looked familiar to her. She took out the returned letters and compared to them, the same puerile handwriting, the same writing mistakes, the same writing paper...

Mrs. Lee staggered out of the room. She held those letters in her hands. *What's happening?* She wondered. *Why are the letters to and from Lady Bai the same?*

Suddenly a thought flashed across her mind.

*Schizophrenia, it's schizophrenia.* She thought. She regretted her negligence of Wing Yee. She must do every possible thing to remedy her fault. But, what can I do? She wondered. She took up the phone... But, whom can I call? She was bewildered.

She suddenly understood Wing Yee, her helplessness, her loneliness, her desire to have someone to rely on and her need to have an adviser to tell her what to do. Mrs. Lee had the same feeling with Wing Yee now. *What can I do?* She kept asking herself repeatedly.

Can I write to Lady Bai too

# Everyday I Wake Up in the Morning

Queenie TSANG Kam Wan

Everyday I wake up in the morning,  
First I see my little brother eating.  
With two eggs one sausage in his stomach,  
He heads off to school with boredom, headache.

Everyday I wake up in the morning,  
My mother quickly does all the washing.  
Working twelve hours till eight o'clock at night,  
Life's like a rope hanging Mother Goose tight.

Everyday I wake up in the morning,  
My father is like his slippers, floating.  
He is short of sleep and dozes in the lift.  
Toil and drudgery make his hands full of rifts.

Everyday I wake up in the morning,  
I read the Bible, pray for answering.  
'For thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands,  
Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.'

# In a party of Mid-Autumn Festival

Doris WAN Ching Lam

The bodies of these people in the common room;  
Bees in a small, dense honeycomb.

## Flowers in the Vase

Anna FAN Wing Sze

It was five minutes to five. Nell tidied up her desk and put the calculator into the drawer. She then grabbed her purse, checked the room carefully to see whether she had left her keys behind. The next minute she was gone. It was five o'clock sharp.

There was a little florist down the street from Nell's office. She went in and spent twenty dollars on a bunch of pink roses. She took the flowers home, threw away the withered ones she had bought the day before and put the new ones in the vase. It was a square-shaped vase. She placed two flowers on the left and two on the right; two in the front and two at the back. The remaining four were placed in the middle. This was Nell's special way to keep the flowers immobile, so none of them could fall out of the vase.

She had congee for dinner. After that she made some soup from chicken and coconut. She ate some and saved the rest in the refrigerator for her younger sister.

Shannon came back after midnight. Her elder sister was asleep. She threw herself into the couch and put her legs on the tea table. She saw the pink roses. The vase was just perfect, she reckoned, for its almost unnoticeable gray color. It stole no attention from the roses. She didn't know about the soup.

\* \* \*

Shannon was already gone when Nell woke up at seven thirty.

Shannon spent four hours in the fitting room, getting prepared for the fashion show next week. In a charming pink gown she looked into the mirror, "I am the prettiest girl in the room."

The next hour she was heading to a studio for a photo shoot for *Chow Seng Seng*. She smiled in delight when the photographer told her, "the expensive jewelry on you didn't sweep our souls; you did."

Soon enough Shannon was found engaging in the shooting of a television advertisement.

“I have taken three and a half cans of soda,” she was red, “I need a break.”

The director was perplexed, “but the crew is going to leave here in an hour, Miss...”

“I’m afraid this is not my problem, young man.”

The next part of the schedule was Shannon’s favourite. She was invited to attend the press conference for the *Hong Kong’s Next Top Model* contest. She couldn’t get enough of the flashlights.

“Look over here Shannon,” someone called out, “what advice would you give to the contestants to become as popular as you are?”

“It’s the hardest thing to achieve!?” Shannon laughed. “But I’m just kidding. I’ll show them how.”

Her work was unending.

It was five o’clock sharp. Nell left her office at once. In the florist she discovered a new species of flowers. They were lovely. But she didn’t buy them, because she always bought pink roses. She got rid of the old flowers and refilled the vase with the new ones in an orderly way.

She made some herbal tea from ginseng and honey. This drink was the best medicine to relieve stress and to restore energy. She put some in the refrigerator.

Shannon came back after midnight. Her sister was asleep. She sniffed the flowers. In her mind she was amazed, “the roses are *always* fresh and beautiful.”

She lay on her bed, thinking that the last time she had seen her parents was five months ago when they had come back to visit her and Nell. “Perhaps it’s my turn to visit them in Canada,” she thought. But the next second she was sound asleep. The ginseng tea was still in the refrigerator.

\* \* \*

Nell was cleaning the guest room early in the morning. She rarely entered this room except when she cleaned it during the weekend. She touched the books there on the bookshelf. Henry



James, Seamus Heaney, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf. She went back to her own room. Her heart ached a little when she saw the calculator on her desk.

Shannon was still sleeping. But she had put a little note on her door: PLEASE WAKE ME UP AT NOON AND BUY ME SOME BREAD. Nell knocked on the door and entered the room. She put her hand gently on her sister's back and uttered, "Shan?" She couldn't help noticing the schedule on the desk:

13.30 Gin's b. day boat party

15.00 Beauty Salon + Hair Salon

18.00 Nema Karaoke Box: new shop opening ceremony

20.00 Steven Chow Movie Premiere

Shannon was less busy on Saturday, Nell thought.

Shannon was chewing a piece of bread when she asked Nell, "How's work?"

"Pretty good. You?"

"Terrific."

This was probably the only occasion where the two sisters saw and talked to each other.

The doorbell rang. Nell opened the door. It was Mrs. Ho from next door.

"You've got to help me, Nell." Mrs. Ho was crying her eyes out.

"What happened? Something wrong with little Rudy?"

The kid was fine. But the father was not. Mrs. Ho was informed that her husband was injured at his workplace. Now she was so anxious to go to the hospital that she asked Nell to take care of her child.

"No problem," Nell answered. "I have nowhere to go anyway." Then she turned to the child. "Come with me, Rudy. Good boy."

The boy followed Nell into the living room. Shannon was there too.

“Shannon,” Nell introduced. “This is Rudy. His mother was...”

“I heard it.” Shannon didn’t even look up. She went to the bathroom.

Nell took Rudy to the couch and let him watch cartoons there. Then she went after her sister. Shannon was looking into the mirror, spraying perfume all over herself.

“Are you not happy with Rudy here?” Nell asked. She was troubled.

“Not particularly,” Shannon continued. “I am going out anyway. But please make sure I won’t see any trace of his existence here when I come back tonight. Trust the wise, kids are all useless and messy. I’d better stay away from them.”

A noise from the guestroom interrupted the conversation. Nell quickened her pace to the room only to find Rudy on the desk and her books all over the floor.

“What’s going on here?” Nell was annoyed. The kid, on the contrary, gave an innocent look. Shannon was standing by the door. “See? M-E-S-S-Y.” Then she went out.

Nell told the kid to come down from the desk.

“Are they your books?” Rudy was curious.

“Yes.”

“They are all so thick.”

“Right.”

“Have you read all of them?”

“I have.”

“Do you still read them?”

“No.”

Nell picked up the books and put them back behind the bookends. When she turned round, the kid was out of sight again.

The worst happened. The boy trespassed on Shannon’s room. Nell told him to come out at once because it was her sister’s room.

“Why does she leave all the lights on in daylight?” His observation impressed Nell. “Mum said saving fuel is everybody’s obligation.”

“Obligation? It’s a difficult word.” She laughed, doubting if a five-year-old kid like Rudy could understand that word. “My sister doesn’t want to walk in the dark when she comes home late at night,” she defended her sister. “She is *afraid* of the dark.”

The two of them returned to the living room. They drew some pictures together.

“What do we draw next?” The little artist asked.

“Your mother?” Nell suggested. Rudy loved the idea. After a while he showed her the picture. In the picture his mother appeared as a teacher.

“Mom is a housewife. It would be great if she were a teacher. Then I don’t have to go to school. Are you a teacher?”

“No. I am not.”

“Then what are you?”

“I am an accountant.”

“What’s an accountant?”

“Accountants do math.”

“I like math.”

“I don’t. Would you care for some cake and milk, Rudy?” She went into the kitchen, cut the cake and poured some milk. When she came out she was not very happy with the boy.

“O dear. What have you done to the flowers?”

Rudy cut off the flower heads and let them float in a bowl<sup>1</sup> of water. “Doesn’t it look terrific?”

Nell stared at the flowers, couldn’t help softening, “it really does.”

The roses looked perfectly happy in the bowl, she thought. They might have fallen off; but they were set free. They were going all directions.

Mrs. Ho came to pick up Rudy in the evening. Mr. Ho had broken one arm but it was going to be fine.

“Did you get into trouble, weirdo?” The mother teased the child. The weirdo made faces at her.

“Not at all. Rudy is a genius,” Nell told the truth.

“Thank you very much, Nell.” Mrs. Ho was grateful.

“You are welcome, Mrs. Ho. Thank *you*, Rudy.”

Nell closed the door. Suddenly she realized this was the first time in years that she had forgotten to buy new flowers. This made her a bit uneasy. But it’s a good start, she thought. She spent the rest of the evening making desserts. The mango pudding tasted sweet. She saved some in the refrigerator.

Shannon came back after midnight. Her sister was asleep. Something was missing, she

believed. The vase and the roses. It was unusual. Something happened here? Murder? Burglary? She gazed around the apartment and her attention eventually landed on a bowl on the tea table. She looked closely into it. The roses were floating on the water.

The flowers were old. But the color was less blinding. They were resting on the water, tranquil and undisturbed. If you looked at them long enough, you would find them moving very slowly. The bowl was delicate. It was ivory white, rather than shiny white. The roses and the bowl looked perfect together.

\* \* \*

Shannon was already gone when Nell woke up at seven thirty.

Nell opened the refrigerator. The pudding was still there. But the soup and tea disappeared.

It was a quarter past five. Nell left her office and stopped at the florist again. She brought home the new species.

She couldn't believe her eyes. Shannon was enjoying a pudding on the couch.

"Don't worry," Shannon assured. "I am not fired."

"I must be stoned out of mind." Nell was astonished.

"I am not getting any younger, sis. Many young girls out there are beautiful and talented. Most importantly, they are rising. It's a good thing though. The fashion world needs new blood from time to time. And I can take a good rest."

"You mean you are going to quit modeling?"

"No, no. By rest I mean to slow things down. In fact I am considering a consultant job. It's way too soon for me to give up this glamorous world.?"

"Sometimes people change, don't they?"

“Absolutely. Sometimes people change overnight.”

“You are getting a consultant job and I am getting a bunch of purple flowers. Do you think it’s something to do with *feng shui*?” They laughed so hard. Nell showed Shannon the new flowers. Nell went to get a pair of scissors; Shannon a bowl of water. They exchanged no word about this new flower art.

Nell put the last flower onto the water. “I thought I have provided myself with the best all these years. It turns out, however, I haven’t Opportunities come and go. And I turn a blind eye to them all,” she continued, “I made wrong decisions. After that I didn’t make decisions at all. This is my way to keep things from going wrong.”

The vase had become a chopstick container since then.

\* \* \*

“Any mail today, Mum?” Nell asked.

“Yes. Here you are, sweetie.”

Shannon took a glance at the *McMug* stickers on the envelope. “Rudy’s seeds, aren’t they?”

“This time is tulip,” Nell was overjoyed. “I love it.” Then she turned to her father, “Dad, do you think I can plant it alongside my lilies?”

“Sure you can. Tulip and lily are best buddies.”

Nell went out to the garden with the seeds. After half an hour she still didn’t come into sight. Shannon went to find her sister in the garden. But her sister was not there. Dad was a great gardener, she thought, there were so many possibilities.

“The wildflower patch,” Shannon caught Nell eventually. “I should have known it. What takes you so long here? Mum said lunch is ready.”

I am writing a poem here. This patch was my *Castalia*.” Nell told Shannon. She saw her

sister in a puzzle. “I meet my muse here.”

“Whatever. No more Greek mythology,” Shannon surrendered. “You are burying the mistakes in the patch, I presume.”

Nell grinned. “What about you? What comes next?”

“I decide to take *Erhu* class. I am searching for something spiritual. I am searching for my soul I guess.”

“Our supermodel plays *Erhu*. Awesome.” Nell just couldn’t picture it. “I am looking forward to seeing you perform in the theatre.”

“What if the great writer’s graduation and the great musician’s performance fell on the same day?”

The sisters strolled along the wildflowers for a moment and went back to the house. The air was delicious.

# I Hawker, We Hawkers

Hester CHAN Lai Man

Clouds of dust are blown up when my sister pulls and lifts and spreads the orange-dyed cloth. It covers some cardboard boxes and large plastic bags under the sofa. I believe they have not been touched for almost ten years. The dust itches my nose and makes me let out a loud sneeze.

“Come on, don’t you know anything about hygiene? Can’t you cover your mouth when you sneeze...”

My sister is used to admonishing us non-stop and I am used to hearing it, too. I am secretly trained to let the voice enter my dear right ear and come out of my left ear. Usually on the eve of each Lunar New Year, my sister, Tam Siu Pik, loves to bring her talent of being a housekeeper into full play. She gives orders, complains of this and grumbles at that. But I cannot deny when she takes up a duty, she is responsible. Most of the time, she is the conductor of a show, yet sometimes, she can be a good player. Just like now, she is squatting beside the sofa and stretching her arm to reach for the plastic bags.

“Tam Siu Mei, hold this! Quick, quick! It’s very heavy!”

\* \* \*

“Tam Siu Mei! Hold this! I’m carrying a large bag already, it should be yours!” Siu Pik shouted at me and frowned with a tiring complexion.

“Sly person! I’m holding one as well! I’ll tell Mommy about this!”

“Go and tell it!” Siu Pik looked askance at me.

I felt a breath choke in my throat. That was unfair, but I knew telling Mommy about this would only bring me trouble. She would scold both of us. I could only take the bag unwillingly. Anyway, it was not far from our destination now.

“Housekeeper Pik, housekeeper Pik, housekeeper Pik...” Whispers were always an effective practice to vent my discontent from childhood till now.



Tam Siu Pik was only two years older than me, but her size was almost twice that of mine when she was twelve and I ten. Sometimes, my younger brother and I did laugh at her bigness. Sometimes, she took advantage of her size, not to help us, but to bully us. Just as she was doing now.

\* \* \*

Wow! The bag is heavy. My heart bumps and my brain cannot help thinking: is it containing those polo-shirts? This bag is unbelievably huge. It is dusty and knotted. Some red and pale blue colours indistinctly stick on the inner surface; figures of buttons and collars protrude from it.

“Wa-ha-ha! Mommy! I found it! Do you know what I have found? The clothes! Clothes!”  
The clothes in my hands are so fresh to my memory.

Mommy gasps and cranes her neck from behind the door of the kitchen. Her curly hair is untidy, her face is reddened and her hands are oily. She is cleaning the cooking stove.

“What?”

“I found it!” I blink my enlarged eyes.

“What did you find that can make you so excited and shout here and there?”

I lift up the huge bag and show her the piles of polo-shirts inside.

“You see? They’re the clothes we planned to sell years ago! Ha-ha, I understand why we couldn’t sell any at that time. Look at them! How ‘fashionable’ they are!”

Tam Siu Pik roars with laughter.

“Ka-ka-Ka-ka. Even those sitting-in-the-park-whole-day idle old men disdained looking at them. Poor us!”

Mommy rubs her hands with a stained cloth. She takes out one from the heaps and inspects it with her far-sighted eyes. “Not so bad as you say. They’re your dad’s factory’s stock. The quality

is very high: every thread is on its own line and the cutting is fine.” She narrows her eyes, “they’re good.” Slowly her eyes stray from the shirt she’s holding to the plastic bag behind it. There are at least two dozens of them.

“What should we do with them?” My brother sits on the plastic bags and swings his trunk back and forth.

\* \* \*

“What should we do with these polo-shirts? They’re new and in good condition.” Mommy examined them through the transparent plastic bags one by one.

Dad owned a factory in China. The polo-shirts were taken home by him one day as some excessive stocks. But he had thought that we could not wear them all because of their same way of design in spite of the different colours.

“Let’s sell them in Tai Po centre! There are many people selling goods on the street on Saturday and Sunday evening. We can sell them and make a big profit. We have two dozen. Each sells for fifty dollars... we can earn...” My little brother frowned at the difficult calculations.

“Yes, yes, yes! There’s no reason to throw them away. We can earn a lot by selling them. I remember those people set up their booths and trolleys at around five or six in the evening... but we have no big trolley...” I was innocent enough then.

“Stupid! Fifty dollars is too much. They should not be more than thirty dollars. We don’t have any trolleys but we can lay a plastic cloth on the ground. It should not be a problem.” Siu Pik was very confident in her thoughts. She was always like a big sister. And she *is*.

“No, we should sell them at twenty-nine point nine dollars. People think twenty-something is cheaper than thirty.” Mum seemed to be interested in this childish idea and she was prepared to be a hawker. “Do you remember we have a very large plastic cloth? The one... that covered this sofa when it was new. I kept it. It will be useful now!”

\* \* \*

How much do they remember of our hawker story? We have not discussed it since we had that experience; even on those family gatherings when we and our relatives recollect memories. But that is the first and the last time we were hawkers. Once is already as much as necessary. I always want to tell them my feelings. But every time when I try to speak, my heart shrieks and my lips are tightened. How strange it is.

Siu Pik continues to pull out other cardboard boxes and plastic bags for the checking process. Almost all of them are stamped as ‘rubbish’ by this strict examiner.

“Kin Fung, don’t sit on the bag. It’s dirty. Come and help me!”

My younger brother bounds over to help her.

Mommy puts down the polo-shirt she is holding and returns to the kitchen. Without turning her head, she said,

“No one will wear them. Let’s throw them away. You see, it’s getting dark now, hurry up to clean the house.”

\* \* \*

It was getting dark when we exhaustedly dragged all the polo-shirts in three large plastic bags to the open square outside Tai Po Shopping Centre. That was a windy and dry autumn evening. We searched every inch of the floor; but we found no spare space. Where could we set up our ‘profit-making’ booth? Mommy looked anxious about this. She was a half-traditional-half-modern mid-thirties woman then. Mommy always had the taste to perform elegantly. But she also had the capacity to hang some old-fashioned clothes on her body or to be keen on gaining petty advantages, if that was to our family’s benefit. Father described that as her virtue of thrift.

“Tam Siu Mei, you stand here with Mommy and look after our goods. I’ll go with Kin Fung and find a suitable place...” Without finishing her sentence, my sister slipped away and ran into the crowd.

I forgot how they found the place. At least, we were settled with the arrangement of my sister. Under the twilight, I found my sister’s silhouette stood out sharply. Everything of her was

rather big: head, eyes, nose, mouth, incisors and especially her skeleton. She was always a *big* sister. That was one of the few times I studied her face carefully. Our philosophy of getting along with each other was quarreling rather than loving. It *is* still our practice. I correlated her name with her size: Pik<sup>1</sup>, big, Pik, big. That was so funny! My mouth corners slightly rose up which betrayed my concealment. Siu Pik seemed to catch my wicked thought and gave me a stern look.

“Why are you standing here? Lay the plastic cloth and set up our booth! The sky is dark already.” My sister could see through people’s eyes. She was also impatient with everything.

Once we started setting our battle array, we realized that we need hangers, money pouch, stools, and even more goods; but we lack everything to be professional hawkers!

Upon the deficiency of being hawkers, we start our business. But immediately my sister hid herself several meters away sitting on a large rock and claimed that she had to take a rest. Whenever I went to her and imitated what she was doing, she scolded me, “Go away! Mommy is alone. Go and help her!”

Why it must be me? I had already taken one more plastic bag than her when we came here. Why could she sit but not I? I did not want to stay here. My heart banged so vigorously that I wondered if there was smoke imperceptibly spurting from my nose and ears. Last week in the English lesson, we learned about jobs. Miss So asked what our fathers did. One boy said his father was a hawker and the whole classmates laughed at him for a week. If I really met my classmates at this moment, I must find a hole in which to hide myself.

Fifteen minutes passed. Thirty minutes passed. Could the time pass quicker? I was thinking if my friends saw me here, I would not look at them and pretend I could not see them. But that was only a self-deceit. I was also thinking I could avoid these shameful possibilities by slipping away and lurking around until Mommy said: we could leave now. Kin Fung could stay here and help her. But my little brother was too young to be helpful. He sat aside quietly for the whole time and played with his Gundam robot. Maybe being quiet was already a help to us. Mommy knelt and stooped down to rearrange the clothes pattern to be perfect while I was standing near the booth and watching her. We have a second to catch each other’s eyes.

“Mommy, will we have any business?”

A silence.

A new idea struck my head.

“Mommy, let me pretend to be a customer and stand in front of our booth. People will think there is something good and worth selling here. Then they will come and buy our clothes. Am I clever?”

Mommy smiled at my idea without nodding or shaking her head. I took her reaction as permission. This was the only exit of being a hawker.

\* \* \*

“Siu Mei, take these plastic bags out to the corridor near to the fire exit. Some old aunties collecting old things may want them.”

Oh, it is Mommy’s verdict to the polo-shirts.

“But they’re new...” How strange! I defend these clothes which once brought me embarrassment.

“No, they’re old now. And they occupy too much space.”

Oh! Don’t you think that it really is a ‘waste’? They are more than clothes. Ai-ya<sup>2</sup>, I do not have enough courage to say so.

“Do you want to sell them again?”

“Ha-ha, no no no. I just think it’s a waste to throw them away.”

“Sell them by yourself if you like. Have you forgotten how our experience was?” Siu Pik interrupted.

I stared at her. How dare you talk about experience?

“Our experience was different. You just sat aside but I helped Mommy.” I protested. “I know you are ashamed to be seen by others. That’s why you didn’t help.”

Her face blushed. Mine too.

“What are you two quarreling at? You two are grown up now; please don’t squabble over petty things. Even if we sold them again, the ending would be the same: no one buys our clothes and we have to close our booth at a very early time while other hawkers are still doing their business!” Mommy tries to harmonize us.

I recall the moment of relief when Mommy announced we could pack our things and go home. On our way home, we drivelled on the philosophy of being a professional hawker.

My sister and I look at each other. Our tight complexions slightly release and our slanting incisors slowly break through our lips. This tooth with the same oblique degree is a characteristic of Tams. Yes, what important is ‘we’ but not the clothes.

My family continues to clean and tidy up the house. Those large bags of polo-shirts are thrown at a corner, stay quietly with other garbage and wait for us to move them out.

1 In Cantonese, ‘Pik’(碧) means jade which is a kind of precious stone. Its Cantonese pronunciation is exactly the same as the English ‘big’

2 ‘Ai-ya’ refers to the sighing and annoying emotion .

# This is Just to Say

(After William Carlos Williams)

Jackie CHAN Hiu Ling

I have broken  
the glass  
that was in  
the cupboard

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for memory

Forgive me  
it was transparent  
so dear  
so meaningless.

# My Own Movies

Susie LEUNG Ling Cheung

I love the movies playing in the sky  
The screen is only visible to me  
My childhood always makes me laugh and sigh

I see myself wave to the kite I fly  
The surfboard that I roll on is the sea  
I love the movies playing in the sky

To beg for chocolate I stamp and cry  
I am monsoon so all the people flee  
My childhood always makes me laugh and sigh

I'm fond of singing pitches that are high  
I use the colour pens to paint my tee  
I love the movies playing in the sky

My teachers shake their heads and all say 'ai!'  
I often mix up 'O' and 'C' and 'G'  
My childhood always makes me laugh and sigh

These movies are impossible to buy  
But I will tell you more so you can see  
I love the movies playing in the sky  
My childhood always makes me laugh and sigh.



# Story of Cinderella

Erica CHAN Ying Shan

Ding Dong... Ding Dong...

I keep on pressing the door bell, but nobody seems to have heard me.

Ding Dong... Ding Dong...

Is she fully occupied? Has she forgotten the appointment? A woman like her is not supposed to be forgetful.

After nearly two minutes, the image of an elegant woman shows up eventually. Oh My God! She cannot be forty years old. She is still holding her lip gloss, but I notice that she does not have thick make-up. Her brownish black hair is tied into a bun. Well, I am sure I will look like forty with that bun, but she demonstrates to me what a thirty year old elegant lady is like. The golden silky one piece dress which exposes her thin and white legs just suits her whole style. Her fragrance is like the siren that will draw you to her.

'I am sorry, Mrs. Cheung. I thought you weren't home. My name is Charlene and I'm the journalist from *Ming Pao*,' I try to declare myself and my purpose of being here seriously.

'I should be the one to be blamed. My servant is out and I feel sorry to keep you waiting. When I heard the door bell, I ran from upstairs at once.' She grins with her shiny white teeth in a way a Disney princess does.

She leads me to the conference room. It is an interminable walk. We ramble past the whole garden. With the bracing sunlight, I really want to take off my shoes like Mrs. Cheng and feel the warmth and freshness of the long green grass. We finally reach the door of her house. It is a big wooden door with crafted angles around the door frame. Oh Gosh! The floor of the living room is granite. Wow, it is just... gorgeous. After walking cautiously on the cochleate stairs, the long and straight corridor is waiting for us. The sense of anxiety and magnificence keep spinning in my head. I am drawn to those Disney posters nailed on the wall. There must be at least twenty which stand next to each other on both sides of the wall neatly. Am I Cinderella who has been brought to the palace by the pumpkin cart? It's just great!

Taking out the interview questions I have prepared long before, I clear my throat and begin to articulate in a professional way, “Mrs. Cheung, it is really my honour to have a chance to interview you. I also would like to congratulate you on being selected as one of the most successful CEOs in Hong Kong. As a successful businesswoman, what do you think is the most important?”

‘Honesty! Definitely honesty.’ She has not thought for even a second to give such an absolute and decisive answer.

‘But a lot of Chinese people believe that “no businessmen are not unscrupulous”. “If you are not unscrupulous, you cannot be a businessman”. You do not agree to such statement?’

Instead of giving me an immediate response, she keeps mute for a while.

‘Mrs. Cheung.’

She seems to have been rescued by me from her deep thought. She leans her head against her palm and ponders for a few seconds. ‘I used to believe... but I have changed.’ She is still drowned in her deep thought.

‘Why did you have such a great change then?’ Being inspired by the instinct, I think that what she is going to say will be a great ingredient for my article. ‘Mrs. Cheung?’

She awakes again and mutters ‘... Why? It was all because of a story... a story...’

‘It is a story about a girl called Wong Kam Dai<sup>1</sup>. A really outmoded and unfashionable name, right? Her mother probably wished her to be strong and brave like a boy. How can a girl be named as “Dai” a younger brother? She hated this name a lot and she would just tell others that her name was Cindy.

‘When Cindy first came to the school, everyone was amazed by her lovely face. She had a pale white face that carried a sense of sympathy. Her eyes were round like eggs engulfed by shields of eyelashes. Unlike other Chinese classmates, her hair was not purely black, but a little bit brownish. Her big head rested on a little body; slender arms and slim legs. You would have the eagerness to protect her from harm by all means. You know, that kind of girl like a princess doll?’

I nod to show her my assent and understanding.

‘Nobody knew anything about her family until one day the other classmates found her student handbook. People were very surprised to see that she lived in Hong Lok Yuen, a residential area for rich people. “Wow, you live there? Is your house a big one with a beautiful garden and fountain?” Her friends kept throwing questions while a crowd surrounded her. “... Ye..yes...” Cindy uttered with a triumphal smile. Ever since then, even more classmates competed to become her friend, a friend with an adorable face, good academic results and a rich family.

‘Every day before the school, during the lunch time and after school, a woman would come to school. Everybody called that woman Ho Che<sup>2</sup>. She was a forty year old woman who looked like fifty. She was so fat and round that gave others an impression that she was clumsy and sluggish. Her worn out white Yasaki<sup>3</sup> sports shoes with tight light blue jeans and yellowish white T-shirt was the best combination for her. The fat all around her body had no way to hide with that pair of jeans. “Ha Miu<sup>4</sup>...Ha Miu...” Ho Che tried to summon Cindy one day after school. “Hey, Cindy, is that woman calling you? She calls you Ha Miu. You’ve got such a funny name?” Other classmates began to show faces full of doubts while laughing about the name. “Of course not! My mother wouldn’t have given me such a nasty name. That woman is just crazy. She used to have a daughter called Ha Miu, but she’s dead now. Maybe she misses her too much,” explained Cindy. People then asked her who that woman was. “...She is...she is just...my...SERVANT!” The word “servant” filled the air and burnt off gradually.

‘Cindy ambled to Ho Che. She was outraged, “How many times have I told you not to call me Ha Miu? You want me to lose face? I still need to survive here.”

‘Ho Che grinned to her, “Your father is Ha Lo<sup>5</sup>, of course you’re Ha Miu. Don’t be angry. I’ve brought your favourite food, baked sweet potato. It is yellow inside. Your favourite.”

“I am not going to eat here. I won’t eat such kind of low class stuff in front of my friends,” Cindy pouted.

‘I like sweet potatoes a lot. Yellow is just my favourite. I wish I could have one now,’ Mrs. Cheung says in an amusing tone. I can sense that this story must be an important inspiration for her. I do not say anything to stop her.

‘Cindy did very well in school and was regarded as the favourite student by a lot of teachers. Her Chinese teacher, Miss Chan, appreciated her writing a lot. She always let Cindy read out her writing in class as a role model for other students. This time, Cindy was about to read her piece with the topic “My Mother” No one had known anything about Cindy’s mother. All the students kept silent and awaited her first word.

“My Mother... My Mother is a successful businesswoman... Because of her job, she cannot stay in Hong Kong all the time. Sometimes, she needs to travel to other countries for a long time. A lot of people say that my mother is very beautiful. Even though she is already forty years old, she looks like thirty only. I’m so proud to have a mother like her. I wish I could be like her when I grow up...”

‘After Cindy read out the whole essay, her classmates could not help staring at her. All of them thought that God was really unfair. She was just like a princess. In fact, she was really as beautiful as Cinderella, which aroused others’ jealousy.

‘Everyone can see the happy ending of Cinderella, but have they thought about how hard her life had been before the prince appeared to save her?’

I notice that Mrs. Cheung has already sighed many times. I also wish that a prince would come and marry me so that I do not have to work so hard for a living. After all, who doesn’t want to have a happy ending like Cinderella?

‘A big challenge came to Cindy. The Parents’ Day was coming. Everybody was talking about having a chance to see Cindy’s mother. They all looked forward to seeing a beautiful and successful woman who had a daughter as beautiful and as successful as she was. Some busy-bodies kept asking Cindy if her busy mother would be able to come.

“I... I really am not sure. You know...you know...she is very busy. If she...she cannot fly back to Hong Kong...you know...you will have a chance to see her someday...” Cindy uttered with fragments.

“Okay! Hey, Cindy! Your crazy servant is coming. Do you know why she always likes to carry that super ugly “red-white-blue” bag<sup>6</sup>? Is she from Mainland China?” said one of the girls in a scornful tone.

“Haha! Maybe she is really crazy.” Cindy kept standing on the ground while Ho Che was carrying a lots of plastic bags filled with all kinds of food.

“Even though she is crazy. She seems to be a good servant. You see! She comes every day just to send you fresh and hot lunch boxes and she comes to pick you up after school. My Pilipino maid will never do that. Ho Che is surely worth paying. Does your family pay her a lot?” another girl showed Cindy a envious expression.

‘While Ho Che was tumbling towards Cindy with all those bags, she stumbled over a stone. All those things inside the bags were thrown out in the air. Instead of helping He Che, all the girls just laughed. They said that Ho Che looked like *a bottle gourd tumbling on the ground*<sup>7</sup>. They just could not stop laughing while Cindy did not know what to do. Ho Che kept hobbling to Cindy even though she was hurt.

“Ha Miu! I’ve bought you some fresh tomatoes. I’ll cook you your favourite fried eggs with tomatoes. Some of the tomatoes were broken. I will just go and buy some new ones.” Ho Che tried to show Cindy an expression that she was all right. Cindy became speechless. She did not make a sound. She just walked behind Ho Che silently.’

Mrs. Chueng stopped for a while. The silence fills the air. I dare not ask any questions. I will just let her continue.

‘Cindy still did not know what to do about the Parents’ Day. She needed to take someone to take the report card. She was still thinking who she could seek help from. Where could she find a beautiful woman? Blink! She thought of her aunt.

‘She then called her aunt and asked for help. “Aunt Sandy, will you be free next Monday? I want you to go to the Parents’ Day with me.” Cindy requested sincerely. Her aunt was curious. Cindy then thought of a good reason. “My mom got hurt when she fell down on the ground. I don’t think she will be able to attend the Parents’ Day. You know! I need someone to take the report card.”

“Is she all right? I should call to see if the injury is serious. Did you take her to a doctor? Did you tell your daddy that she got hurt? Did you do some of the housework for her?” Aunt Sandy kept babbling to Cindy.

“Wait.. wait... You don’t have to call her. Er... er... if you call her... she will... certainly go to the Parents’ Day. You know her, right? You don’t have to tell her. We’d better not...” Cindy tried her best to find a reason to stop her aunt from doing something stupid. “Ok? Besides, you don’t have to tell the teachers that you are my aunt. They may not let us take the report card if you’re not my parent. Just say that you’re my mother. And I remember that you have a really beautiful suit that you wore in Uncle Tam’s banquet. You can wear it next Monday. You’ll just look gorgeous.”

‘Aunt Sandy seemed to accept Cindy’s reasoning. She promised Cindy she would go to the Parents’ Day with a beautiful dress and pretend to be Cindy’s mother. As expected, everyone was amazed by the appearance of Aunt Sandy. With the suit, she looks really professional, just like a businesswoman. She looks so young and elegant which all fits the description by Cindy about “her mother”.

‘Thinking that she was successful, Cindy did not know that another challenge was ahead of her. Her classmates were planning to throw a party celebrating the end of a semester. They suggested that they could all go to Cindy’s big house so that they could invite more people. Cindy thought of all kinds of reasons to decline that. She failed at last.

‘She really brought some of her classmates back to the big house. The house was like the one they saw on TV for really rich people. They had to walk for a long time across the garden with fresh green grass, a bursting fountain, a big golden-framed door which led them into a big living room with all kinds of expensive antique vases and great paintings. It was more like a palace.

‘Everything was all right until they heard a fierce voice. “Hey, you! How dare you bring so many people in my house? Who do you think you are? Have you asked for my permission? How dare you. You little bastard. I am the owner of this house. Who are you? You’re just a daughter of a servant here,” a sixty year old man in a golden silky gown bawled while whacking his wooden stick in the air.

‘Everyone was so scared. They just kept on staring at Cindy’s sobbing face. Without saying a word, everyone knew what was going on. Cindy was not the perfect and happy princess.’

Mrs. Cheung keeps silent again for a while. I try to gain enough courage to ask her the relationship between the story and her successful story.

‘Ha Miu! I’ve made some desserts for you. Miss Journalist, you may have some,’ a fat woman hobbles into the conference room with some mango pudding. Her smiling face gives me a sense of warmth.

‘Charlene, here I would like to introduce my mother. Everyone calls her Ho Che. Feel free to try some. She is really good at cooking.

‘Ho Che? She...is...your...mother?’ I cannot help hemming.

‘Yes. She is my mother. Hey, why don’t we take a picture together with my two little sons? Hey, Frank! Hey, Ernest! Come and take a picture together!’

1. In Chinese, “Kam” sounds like another Chinese word which means brave and “Dai” means younger brother. Chinese people believe that by giving a girl a name like a boy will bring them toughness and health.
2. Chinese people usually call a woman “Che” which means sister or aunt. “Ho” means good. “Ho Che” becomes Good Aunt.
3. Yasaki is a brand which used to be popular in the eighties, but to youngsters, it is an old-fashioned brand.
4. “Ha” is shrimp. “Miu” means younger sister, but parents like to call their daughters “miu”. “Ha Miu” becomes Shrimp Daugbter.
5. “Lo” means man, especially those who look tough and rough. “Ha Lo” means Shrimp Man.
6. Red-white-blue bags are big nylon bags people use to carry lots of things when going back to China. A lot of Chinese people use them.
7. This is a Chinese proverb which is used to describe people who fall down clusimly.

## Mistake

(a trial translation with modification from Cheng Shou Yue's Mistake)

LAU Cheuk Yan

I wander from the South  
Waiting for the bloom and death  
Which live like a lotus in seasons

East Trade never comes  
Nor the willows of March  
Wave its coming

Your heart is like,  
Like a little town of stillness  
Like the silent steps of green pebbles in Night

Those steps do not echo with your steps  
Just like Spring hides itself in snow ---  
A cover prevents your coming

Or now your heart is staying behind a blind  
Peeping through its brink  
And longs for the return of him

I am not him  
The horse hoof and my attempt  
Only make a dreamy mistake



# Unbeing

LAU Cheuk Yan

I always wonder whether words  
Can convey the feeling of unbeing  
Like an angel on the tip of a sword  
Delicately evolves when dancing

I also let my pen perform jazz  
Within the hall of whiteness  
And my self is in absolute recess  
Nothing is behind the pen but blankness

But blankness cannot conceal my presence  
When you see the pattern of this poem  
In a-b-a-b rhyme  
Sorry. My motivation is definitely solemn

If you agree with Wordsworth  
That growth is but continuous forgetfulness  
I hope you read this poem like a moth  
Which flies into the bright for its innate fullness

After you've read it you may complain  
That it teaches you nothing  
But a lump of words occupies your brain  
Once you forget it - you feel what is unbeing

# My Family Physiognomist

Ruby YONG Wai Ting

“Grandma, Kung Hei Fat Choi! I wish you a healthy body and eternal happiness.” My little cousin in a scarlet Chinese Kung Fu suit embroidered with a huge flying dragon on the back blessed my Grandma cheerfully. My Grandma was flattered and laughed toothlessly. She immediately stuffed my cousin’s palm with a bunch of Li Shi sweets and a red packet.

It was Lunar New Year again. The parlor was crowded with people who would only meet once a year. The men were playing poker in the sitting room with the air filled with smoke and excitement. All the women in the family were sitting around the dining table, eating melon seeds and gossiping.

When I first overheard my auntie gossip about her son dating a new girl who was a faithful Christian, I could already sense that my cousin would not have a long relationship with that girl.

“Do you know that Christians need to go to church every weekend and devote 10% of their incomes to their church? What nonsense! Christianity is such a misleading and diabolical religion,” my auntie commented furiously.

“Last time, when my son offered to date a Catholic girl, I immediately said no. Come on, I won’t let my son have any contacts with the Virgin Mary,” my mum contributed.

“Right! You know we all worship Wong Tai Sin, Guanyin and Buddha. Christianity and Catholics are just intolerable in our family,” my grandma concluded in an authoritative tone.

“By the way, have you devoted to Wong Tai Sin this month? I mean the Fragrant Oil Money!” my grandmum added.

Listening to these women haranguing each other was really interesting. Everyone just endeavored so hard to contribute to the conversation and hoped their own philosophy could arouse the others.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang and my relatives stood up and gazed at the entrance. The one they had expected for the whole afternoon finally arrived. It was my family physiognomist and her

husband. I hadn't seen her for a year and she was still the same: looking like a smiling Buddha. Her smile was always friendly, amiable but at the same time it concealed something unreachable and mysterious. Her perfect circular mole near her mouth moved up and down when she was bestowing fortune telling. My mum said it was the mole that enabled Auntie Pik Chiu to predict one's destiny by looking at one's palm. She not only knew fortune telling but she also self-declared that she was an expert in geomantic omens and communication with the spirits.

"So, you can recognize this long, curved line is actually your career line. As it is long and continuous, you will have a very good career prospect in your new job," Auntie Pik Chiu explained while pointing at my brother's palm.

"Really? Great!" my brother was exhilarated and forgot how his ex-girlfriend was being criticized and attacked for her religion at first.

Auntie Pik Chiu was famous in my family because of her accurate prophecy. A lot of her predictions were being fulfilled one by one. All the seniors respected her and all the juniors were obliged to respect her. I, being a super junior in such a big family, was no exception even after that unhappy experience with her.

"You'd better go to greet Auntie Pik Chiu now and thank her again for helping you to get into the college!" my mum ordered.

Yes, she really helped me once, though I still wondered whether it was her or myself who got me into the college. That was the year when I was sticking my brain to the past papers and became unconscious about time and my mum was extremely worried about my admission into college. It was very normal that my mum would ask for Auntie Pik Chiu for advice whenever she was in a maze.

"What's your daughter's Sheng Xiao<sup>1</sup>?"

"Dog. Is it a good year for her to study? After this summer she is supposed to go to college." My mum was agitated.

Auntie Pik Chiu closed her eyes and murmured for a while. Then she opened her eyes with flashes and said, "Well, to be honest, it's not that satisfactory but don't worry, I will teach you what

to do! Ask your daughter to wear new green socks for every examination. Green can block the bad luck and new socks can bring her luckiness. Bear in mind, the socks should be new or they won't work!" Auntie Pik Chiu patted the back of my mum's hand. My mum was relieved and plugged Auntie's palm with a red packet. I later knew that there was \$500 dollars in that red packet.

After that, whenever I sat for an exam, my mum prepared me a pair of new green socks. The exams were unexpectedly smooth, and nearly without any obstacles I got into the best college in Hong Kong. I was amazed with this since I never had luck in exams. I had encountered all kinds of misfortunes during exams: headache for Chinese Culture, stomachache for English Usage and malfunctioning radio for Listening. Did the green socks truly bless me? I really wondered.

Under my mum's stressful stares, I approached Auntie Pik Chiu and said thank you.

"Oh! What an easy job for me! You are Welcome!" She once again smiled like a Smiling Buddha. "How's the red underwear working?" she asked.

Red underwear? My dad really wore the new red underwear while playing mahjong and gambling for horse racing? No wonder I found tons of new red underwear in the closet.

"Of course they worked! So far her dad has already won a few thousands dollars. I have followed your guidelines strictly. I have thrown away all the worn underwear and packed them in black plastic bags," my mum interrupted.

"Right. Should be black plastic bags as they can prevent the bad luck from reaching your husband," Auntie Pik Chiu emphasized seriously.

"Oh! Pik Chiu! You have just helped our family so many times. How could I reward your generosity?" My mother said whole-heartedly.

I was standing between them, speechless. It was inconceivable that my dad would accept such superstitious ideas! He always blamed Mum for wasting time on such nonsense and mocked those physiognomists as liars, cheats, scandal-mongers and hypocrites.

"Dad believes in Auntie Pik Chiu now? Finally?" I was surprised.

“Yes! Just after he has won \$3000 for the first time he wore red underwear while gambling. I knew it. I knew he would believe in it when he experienced such mysterious power from Pik Chiu.” My mum really understood my dad. Auntie Pik Chiu said they were destined to be a couple for three consecutive lives.

I had an impulse to form an alliance with my dad to convince my mum not to indulge in such mysterious power anymore after that unhappy experience. I felt terrible about this and tried to trace back to see whether it was my problem or Auntie Pik Chiu’s problem.

It was after I had entered college. It was when I was a 19-year-old girl. It was when all my friends had dates. It was when I desperately desired to taste love. Simply saying, it was the time when I wanted a boyfriend. Studying in a girl’s secondary school totally prevented me from making friends with boys and I assumed, quite sure, that I would have a date in college.

“Daughter, are you dating now?”

“No, what’s the matter?”

“You are already 19, go to seek a boyfriend in college or it would be very difficult for you to have one after graduation. Newspaper reports that there are more girls than boys in Hong Kong nowadays. I won’t make you stay at home and become a “Cooker Stuffer”<sup>2</sup>.” My mother was annoying but considerate.

“Actually I have a target now but I really don’t know the chance of developing a relationship with him.” I was shy but I was willing to tell my mother about this, as she was my best friend.

“Oh! Really? That’s easy. Let me ask Auntie Pik Chiu,” my mum confirmed.

“What? She doesn’t know my target and how can she tell? Also, don’t ask me for a picture of that boy. I don’t have any.” I was shocked.

“You really underestimate her power! She can communicate with the spirits in another space and know everything in the past and future,” My mother said secretly, in a very low tone.

“I just don’t want her help and please, please don’t tell my other relatives...and don’t even mention that I have a target. Alright?” I really appreciated my mum’s care but I was also thundered. I felt I was being humiliated if I needed spirits to get me a love life.

My attitude changed after a week.

It was on the wedding banquet of my cousin. I was arranged to sit with Auntie Pik Chiu and this aroused my relatives’ envy. Sitting with Auntie Pik Chiu could mean a lot to them and everyone wanted to be close to her.

My cousin was five years older than me and she looked fantastic in that wedding dress. Her wedding ring was carved with a 5-carat-diamond. It glittered. It shined. It sparkled.

Auntie Pik Chiu noticed that I was staring at the bride with envy and asked “Do you have a boyfriend now?”

“No, I am afraid I’ll never have one.” I was sad. There was a rumor in my university that people would never date if they could not find dates in the first year. I was year two already. I was hopeless.

“But you’ve got a target, right?”

“Well...um...yes.” I blushed and was amazed. How could she possibly know I had a target?

Later I remembered that I had already told my mother about this and she then told one of my aunties who was a super Microphone in my family.

“Any progress between you and this boy?” Her voice was so powerful and I could not shriek from her question.

“No. Not recently.” I was totally embarrassed. My other relatives were already overwhelmed with my LOVE LIFE and gazed at me.

“What does your boyfriend look like?”

“Is your boyfriend now studying or working?”

“When will we meet him?” The questions were shot at me, like firing bullets.

“Wait, Wait, he’s not my boyfriend!” I was furious. My relatives all looked disappointed and sympathetic. They pitied my lack of love life.

“Do you want my help?” Her voice was tempting.

“Can you?” I was tempted.

“Of course. Replace all your fake flowers displays with real flowers. Fake flowers frighten away your peach blossom luck<sup>3</sup>. Wear yourself as pink as possible whenever you meet him. Also, you have to be more aggressive in this relationship as that boy is quite passive and timid. Do you get my points? I know this boy likes you, but your fake flowers prevent him from approaching you.”

“You know my target? How can you possibly know he likes me?”

“Can you see that roasted pig’s little head? It’s pointing at you and this means you’ve got a loved one who is also in love with you. He has affection towards you.” I looked at the roasted pig’s head and it was smiling at me. I imagined holding my target’s hands, walking along the Victoria Harbor. Hopes bewildered all over me.

“Thank you.” I was comforted. I felt intimacy towards her, and I was relieved. I dreamed of having a boyfriend since I was in college. I had a good family. I had a good academic result. I had a bunch of good friends. But I lacked a good love life. Auntie Pik Chiu just soothed me.

The next day I threw away all the fake chrysanthemums and roses and replaced them with real, fresh lilies and orchids. My room was penetrated with the scent of spring and I felt that the love seed was budding. Then, to my astonishment, I found I had a missed call from my target and he left a voice message for me.

“Hey, I want to go to movie with you tonight. Will you be free? Call me back!” I was magnetized by his bass, strong, masculine voice. A date. I finally had a date with him, just the two

of us. After confirming the place and the time with him, I put on a stylish pink make up: pink lip-gloss, pink eye shadow, and pink blush. I was in a pink dress embroidered with a plant of blooming peach blossom, which symbolized the coming of love. When I looked into the mirror I found myself a paper doll, which was used in Ching Ming Festival. My mum screamed when she saw me. Actually I scared myself too but this was Anutie Pik Chiu's instruction and I should follow. So, I put on my pink high heels which made me look even more terrible, and left home with all my courage.

I found myself as the most courageous girl in the world when I arrived at the cinema. I had just passed through streets crowded with people who all gave me that weird look of despise. It was extremely embarrassing but I would attain my goal regardless of everything. Having a boyfriend was most important thing in my life.

I could sense that he was amazed when he first saw me, but he was not frightened. He observed me for a couple of minutes and said, "You look very special tonight."

"Really? I have prepared myself for a long time." I was flattered. It worked!

Then we had a very happy conversation and he suddenly suggested going to the Victoria Harbor to have a chat but not to the movie. That's exactly what I have pictured for my entire life though we were not holding hands. We both kept silent while walking along the Harbor and he abruptly grabbed my hand.

"Oh! It's the time! Thanks Anutie Pik Chiu!"

He looked into my eyes with hesitation. I looked back into his eyes in order to encourage him to confess his love to me. He finally spitted a word; "I think I have fallen in love with your roommate. Would you kindly help me to tell her my love? I was already obsessed with her."

"WHAT?"

I couldn't control myself but just let the shout of "What" out. It was impossible. Anutie Pik Chiu said he liked me and we would be together if I replaced the fake flowers and if I wore pink. I calmed myself down and pretended that I was hearing his love confession to my roommate, but actually I was reviewing which step I had taken wrongly.



I didn't tell Anutie Pik Chiu about this but just blamed myself for being so stupid. How could one get a boyfriend by dressing like a pink paper doll? How could one be so innocent and naïve when she was already in tertiary education? How could one possibly believe in such ridiculous, non-scientific crap? It was my stupidity that made me so disappointed.

“Pik Chiu, how's my daughter's peach blossom luck this year?” my mum still cared about my love life a lot.

“No problem. She had a target, right? Just ask her to wear pink, replace all the fake flowers and...”

I listened, and flashed back to the night when I looked like a paper doll.

1 Sheng Xiao: One of the twelve animals symbolizing the Twelve Branches used to designate years (according to lunar calendar)

2 Cooker Stuffer: Those girls who cannot get married and become a burden of their family are called “Cooker Stuffer?”

3 Peach blossom luck: Peach blossom luck means luck of getting a lover in Chinese culture.

## One - Way

(Thinking of Wang Zhaojun)

Corinna LIEW Ching Han

Heading West, she's soon others' possession.  
The slow march reminds her this is one-way.  
Sheath frosts; heart dies for the sake of national progression.  
Flute wails, and she weeps till all faiths decay.

Seeing off armour; puts on her gown,  
Obliged to be graced; honoured, tough.  
Some die, some survive. All respect the crown.  
May her tried beauty pay off.

# The Carven Hands

Wallace MA Wai Lun

The numeral elves dancing on the card,  
Shone and watered mother's smile on the sands,  
The naïve carven art they mask and fard,  
Burdened the tiny, fleshy, trembling hands.

With naked, perfumed elves, the winking coins  
On which sang the extravagant men, "bans?  
No ban! No ban! What's the point? What's the point?"  
Were sucked by the thirsty but skillful hands.

Satan's roaring, overwhelming claws crawl  
As the army ants shocking all the lands  
Trampling, hillnig, cramming all th'inner bawl,  
Carving the bony rooty, icy hands.

The pure statues of hands forest the hell  
Vining and shaping the earthly hands well.

## Bubbles

Debbie CHOI Wing Lam

“It is too sad for her!” I murmur softly, lest I wake my roommate who is so sweetly asleep after doing her assignment. Well I don’t mean to write about something miserable or discouraging. But when I am sitting here late at night, hearing nothing but the silence, sometimes the echoes of the slamming doors outside; smelling nothing but the air filled with emptiness; tasting nothing but my dry throat, an English major; holding nothing but a blunt pencil for drafting; I am unconsciously giving her a miserable ending. I am sorry, Beatrice.

*She used to write in her diary once a week or maybe twice if something memorable happened to her. But now, she writes in it daily or, even twice a day. She is a healthy person with heart rate of 75 beats per minute. But her heartbeat is no longer as regular as before. She is a rational person who usually analyses her friends’ situation for them and makes appropriate decisions. But her rationality is no longer as effective as before. She is a smart person who has the clearest mind in the world. But her mind is no longer as clear as before.*

*Today, during the lecture, she drew pictures on her lecture notes. She slept on her desk for a few minutes and then sat up again. But two minutes later, or after a quick sketching on her notes, she reposed on her desk again.*

*“Beatrice, are you sick today?” Zoe asked her softly.*

*Silence for two seconds... she slowly turned her face to Zoe and murmured,*

*“Well... I am still okay!”*

*Then, she turned her head, still feeling heavy, and slept until the lecture ended.*

This behaviour is not good! Am I right? Do you agree? I suppose you would say yes! So, I am sorry once again Beatrice, but you know, that is really too common in university students’ lives. And Beatrice is typical of them. And she is disturbed today. So I don’t and I can’t allow her to sit up straight and listen attentively to the professor like some sharp students do. Beatrice, sorry that I cannot give you proper behaviour at the moment!

*Then, they had finished all their classes today. As usual, they went to the Coffee Corner for tea. As usual, Beatrice ordered the chicken wings with salad, plus a glass of iced lemon water. As usual, Zoe ordered the French fries, plus a glass of iced tea. As usual, they shared the food together. As usual, they gossiped about what was happening around them, for example, how their “Mr. Enemy” showed off in the tutorials, how angry they were at the printers in the library which didn’t function when they wanted them the most, how some strangers acted next to their tables, etc. Their topics would never be insufficient! But unusually, it was only Zoe talking. Beatrice only nodded her head or simply said “um...”, “yes!”, “huh huh...”, or “right!”.*

*“Beatrice, I hate you... you are the most stupid pig of this world... and my name is Tracy and we are good friends with Mr. Enemy! Do you think so? Ha!” said Zoe, intending to bring back Beatrice’s “three souls and seven spirits”.*

*“Yes... Right... Huh Huh...” Beatrice replied while her hand floated over the dish in order to meet and pick up a piece of French fry that suited her mood.*

*“Hey! Beatrice!” Zoe shouted annoyingly.*

*S-P-L-A-S-H !!*

*Beatrice was frightened by Zoe’s shout and the muscles in her arms contracted so suddenly and involuntarily that they made a mistake: she struck her elbow on the glass and split the whole glass of iced lemon water onto the table.*

*“Finally! Finally your spirits are all back!!” Zoe grumbled in a blaming tone, as they were both busy wiping the table and their clothes.*

*“I am sorry!”*

I think I had better start writing about the secret! Otherwise I need to apologize not only to Beatrice, but also to Zoe who started to be impatient and annoyed. And, maybe, also to you! So, here it goes!

*After cleaning up the spilt drink, they were back in conversation. Beatrice looked at Zoe for a few seconds and her fork was picking up the French fries repeatedly. Actually, her “picking” is*

*“chopping”! The French fries became shorter and shorter!*

*“Do you remember Sam? The guy I mentioned to you before. Long ago. I said he was my very good friend.” Beatrice finally found a way to start the topic of her love for Sam.*

She knew Sam five years ago when they were in Form Five. Gradually, they unconsciously reached each other’s heart. They talked everyday through ICQ or phone. They loved to use songs to communicate, or more appropriately, they loved to use the lyrics they both loved to communicate. This kind of interaction lasted for one year. How sweet and innocent! I was once like Beatrice.. Once.

*“At that time, I was a student who only took responsibility as a student. That is, I only studied hard and I didn’t have any hobbies. Since I knew him, I had my hobby. I only studied hard and waited for the time to chat with him. My world became fully occupied with these two things only. I really loved chatting with him so much because there didn’t seem to be a tiny bit of dust blocking our channel. We did not only understand each other’s experience but also the feelings deep down. We did not communicate by mouth or word, but by our hearts. We did not listen to what the other said but we felt. Our two minds worked perfectly together as if they were one. It amazed me.”*

*Zoe did not stop Beatrice. She knew that Beatrice was actually eager to tell all these. Once she started telling, she would be willing and eager to tell everything. Then, Beatrice stopped because she wanted to eat the chicken wing.*

*“So actually you loved him in a more-than-friends way! Didn’t you?” grabbing the chance to speak, Zoe asked.*

*Beatrice briefly had a bite on the chicken wing, swiftly wiped her mouth and continued,*

*“I was silly... I typed ‘I love you but don’t misunderstand that’s something between lovers... I really love to have a friend like you?’”*

This is Beatrice, she is a rational and smart person but, deep inside her, she is another person - innocent and sentimental.

Five years ago, she met Sam and had a wonderful year, though they were not a pair. However, destiny was jealous of them and Beatrice accepted another boy's, Alex's, love. Just two days after, Sam finally inhaled the air of courage deeply and knocked at Beatrice's door. Cruelly, Beatrice had to tell him the truth about Alex. She knew that was killing news for Sam. Actually, telling such news sent her into deepest abyss of pain as well.

Since then, Sam accepted another girl. The two young lads seldom contacted each other. But they did talk sometimes. In four years, day to day, month to month, year to year, memories of Sam still lingered in Beatrice's heart, though she was not really aware of that, until the night they talked overnight on the phone:

*10p.m., it was not yet too late for Hong Kong families. And, she just lived on the second floor. So, she could still clearly see two kids playing happily with the bubbles in the park down there. Then she panned her sight upwards - it was a starry night - Beatrice's favourite sky. She lay on her bed, facing the big window through which the charm of the mysterious stars attracted her deeply. In the all-encompassing silence, the voice of Sam came into her ears clearly through the phone. The two minds were connected and communicating again. And, nothing could not be talked between them.*

*"Though we can't be together, I'm glad to have felt for you and be felt by you!" Beatrice told in a casual tone, aiming just to let Sam know he deserved her care and time, even just as friends.*

*"Actually... I'm sorry... I shouldn't be that shy. I should have the courage... just two days earlier... he could... regret..." Sam said, with a shaky voice. So shaky that it can vibrate Beatrice's heart in a boosting manner.*

*Tick-Tack-Tick-Tack... Two seconds of silence.*

*"Huh?" Beatrice made a soft sound.*

*Bumbum - bumbum - bumbum... Thirty seconds passed.*

*"I truly miss you." Beatrice sent back the vibes. They burst into tears then - tears which came in a quiet but powerful way, tears which came without precursory notice. The more they*

*talked about their past, the more vigorously their hearts bumped. Moments of wholehearted talk. Moments of affection. The stars observed all the scenes until they were invisible under the rising sunshine.*

It was that chat that retrieved their memory significantly; and the one that led Beatrice to dream more about the past. Dreaming is not a bad thing but dreaming about the past to be the future is not really encouraging! Don't you think so? You may not like the way that I give a discouraging plot for an innocent girl. But, I also don't know why. My pencil drifts from left to right and writes down all these things as if it controls my mind instead of being controlled by it. And, this kind of dream does not exist and lead to significant consequences! That's the reality!

*Having heard everything about Beatrice's story, Zoe couldn't say anything. She just stared at Beatrice's face in front of her. Worries agitated her.*

*"Maybe you should think about clearly what you really want and why your heart feels in these ways... it's you who knows yourself the best..." Zoe advised.*

*Days had passed uneasily.*

*"Should I leave Alex for Sam?"*

*It's unfair to any of them if I keep the present situation!"*

*"They are both good people!"*

*"But after all... do I really know myself the best?"*

*A week in ennui and disturbance had passed. A decision was made. It was a carefree day again back in the university.*

*"Hey Zoe!" Beatrice shouted to stop Zoe who was on the opposite side of the road.*

*"Hi, Bee! You look fresh today!" Zoe said in an amazed tone.*

*"Yes!! I Am Indeed!" Beatrice reassured Zoe.*



*Then they chatted as before and had a great after-lecture tea in their beloved Coffee Corner. At 5 p.m., they left.*

*Beatrice didn't go home immediately. She took the KCR and during the journey Sam occupied her mind. She immersed herself happily in her mind just as the kids surrounded by the fantastic bubbles they themselves made. She got off at the Kowloon Tong Station and went to Festival Walk for Sam's birthday present. When she just left the KCR station, her mobile rang. In reply to her energetic "hello", it was Alex's voice.*

*In a split second: her eyes spotted Sam walking close with a girl while her ear heard "Glad that your voice has become lively again! So does my mind then!"*

*Beatrice didn't say anything but kept walking and walking involuntarily, until she was stopped by a poster. On the poster, it said,*

*"Don't be cheated by your tricky heart!"*

Dreams are made of bubbles! They are really beautiful. They seem to have a mysterious kind of magic that appeal us. But after all, they are just bubbles. No matter how beautiful they are, they cannot last forever. They cannot become balloons which are made of tougher plastic. You may well recognize this fact too. But, how many of us can recognize it when it comes to us?

C'est la vie.

Finished drafting. Time for bed; time for dreams now. I actually enjoy dreaming as long as I don't know when they would come and when they would vanish.

## Swimming Day

Kristy CHAN Hiu Wah

When swimming in the sea of deepest blue,  
A man yells having pair of goggles lost  
With people staying silent as a rule.  
The sea will keep its calm, and always just  
Has long been here in having mystery sealed.

When children play with not the slightest rue,  
Their giggles telling something canniest  
No matter how they trick the man with rue.  
The sea - so naughty in their youthful quest -  
Has long been here in making memory fresh.

# The Chef's Complaint

Kristy CHAN Hiu Wah

Merry liver in a package,  
Other people other vintage.  
Everything I have to manage.  
Say the cuisine unimpressive,  
Lucid joy be quantitative?

# A Diary of a Hero

Barbie LAU

Tuesday, November 4, 2003

Dear Diary,

My parents are so fussy again about my eating habits. I just pick out the tiny yellow ginger strips sprinkled on the steamed fish and the small pieces of dried fruit skin in the red bean soup. My mother always scolds me when I do this: "Don't waste the food, or I'll kill you." Isn't it tiring to yell at the same person everyday? I cannot argue with her, so I can only imagine she were a bird singing to nobody. I would rather go to hell than to eat the ginger and the fruit skin. I cannot bear the smell and taste. But amazingly my parents find those creepy things delicious. Am I really their child? Why do we not like the same thing? Perhaps I watch too much television, so I keep wondering: Was I born from the sudden burst of a stone like the Monkey King in *Journey to the West*? Did I spring from a flower bud like the Big Thump? Am I a child of another couple but my parents picked the wrong one, me, as their child? No, no. I learn from my natural science class that it is universally true and scientifically proven that no stone or flower gives birth to human babies. When I brush my teeth at night and look in the mirror, I can see a face resembling my father's. I am still my parents' son. But why am I so different from them? Why did I not inherit their genes of liking to eat ginger strips and dried fruit skin? Why?

\* \* \*

Thursday, November 6, 2003

Dear Diary,

I hate Pork Choi! Today he made fun of me again. During lunchtime, he said in front of the whole class that I did not wash my hands before I had my lunch. I felt my cheeks were burning. Of course every Primary 3 student knows that you should wash your hands before eating anything. But this afternoon was a different case. When Pork Choi entered the toilet, I was so hungry and eager to get rid of him that as soon as I finished my business, I immediately dashed out to the canteen. I forgot that Pork Choi had the habit of broadcasting my faults to the public. Ever since I reported to the teacher that he and his gang were eating potato chips during lesson two months ago, whenever I enter the classroom in the mornings, they greet me with jeers. They show me black faces when I approach them. I think it is merely an act of revenge, and jealousy too. They run around the

classroom all the time, chasing each other and playing hide-and-seek. It seems that they are never tired - where does their energy come from? I notice they pass small paper notes to others during lessons. I think they are brats. Other classmates fear Pork Choi because he is big enough to knock a kid down. I am not afraid of him, except one thing. I really feel uncomfortable when he shows my classmates how poor I am and makes me the laughing stock of the whole class. Probably it is true that good and bad students are like two poles of a magnet and can never get along well. I am always happy whenever my teacher praises me. I am the only volunteer to sit in the front row and pay attention in class. I always stick to my seat during class, breaks and lunchtime, except for going to the toilet. I decline my neighbour's offer when he invites me to eat some potato chips. I never eat snacks; I am trained to automatically repel chips and chocolate because my parents say that snacks are rubbish. I do not want my stomach full of rubbish and worms. Do you eat snacks, my Diary? I hope you do not, or else rubbish worms will grow in your stomach.

I believe I am a bit special, but I do not know the reason. I wish I were Superman, because he knows what he must do to fight against evil and save all mankind. It is really cool! Was I born with a similar mission that I must find out by myself? Am I a reincarnation of the monk Xuanzhuang in Journey to the West to obtain the holy Buddhist scriptures from India? Am I another Jesus Christ to save the world? I think and think and think, but then I fall asleep each time. Where can I find the answer?

\* \* \*

Sunday, November 9, 2003

Dearest Diary,

Diary, I think I have an answer now! Thanks, Uncle Ying!

You know Uncle Ying? Uncle Ying loves kids very much, but he is a bachelor. I am his only nephew. Looking at the photo taken when I was a month old, I can see a tiny, sticky white rice dough clinging to my mother's arm. My eyes, nose, mouth are all creased together. I can feel that I am suffocating in the smoky Chinese restaurant, hugged by the seamless compliments of my relatives. I notice Uncle Ying smiling and holding my little left hand when I try to push away the hubbub. His hand embraces my tiny fist, a little dot on his palm.

Uncle Ying loves to cuddle and tickle me to laughter, and my mother regularly invites him

to come over for dinner on Sundays. I wonder why my mother does not take me to visit Uncle Ying's house. I never ask. Time is the key. This morning, the sound of unlocking the door crept into my ears. I heard my mother talking to Uncle Ying. The conversation went something like this:

“Sis, I swear, I won't let anybody touch any hair of Little Dot<sup>1</sup>. He's my only nephew! It's a Dai-hup's duty to protect the old, the weak, women and children. You know that right? You should have faith in me!”

There was a brief silence. “That's not what I mean. I just want to make sure Ah-Hung will not cause you any trouble.”

“No, he's a good boy. I can tell he will grow into a big man. I'll take good care of him. Don't worry, sis! It's a Dai-hup's duty to guide a boy into a real man.”

Another brief silence. “Ying, that's what I worry about. Don't mention Dai-hup this and Dai-hup that to Ah-Hung. He's so small. He knows nothing. I don't wish to see a second 'you' in our family.”

“Don't worry, sis. You should feel honored to have a brother like me! Do you know any woman who has the luck to be a Dai-hup's sister? It's a Dai-hup's duty to honor the people he cares for and loves!”

It still sounds strange to hear Uncle Ying's effort to repeat “Dai-hup” so many times. All our family members know that Uncle Ying is a Dai-hup maniac. At first, when my grandparents found out their son was so obsessed with the idea of Dai-hup, they even planned to send him to the Castle Peak Hospital. Later, of course, the doctor said there was nothing wrong with his head. I once asked my uncle what a Dai-hup was, and he immediately gave me a long and detailed explanation: “Dai-hup is a great man who excels in Chinese martial arts and represents righteousness for the commoners. It's really a pity that nowadays he only appears in Chinese movies and novels.” Why doesn't he make it short and say that Dai-hup is actually a hero?

My mother told me that my great-grandmother had a stroke and was sent to the hospital early this morning. I have never seen my great-grandmother before. At least I cannot recall my memory of meeting her anywhere. My father was out at work. No one could look after me, my mother calculated in her mind, except Uncle Ying. So here I was in his house.

My heart pounded when I heard a soft 'click' sound. I was quite sure that there was something waiting for me. Uncle Ying unlocked and opened his door. The first thing that caught my eyes was a horse, a tall white horse. I know what horses are. I happened to catch a glimpse of them when my father switched on the TV and watched horseracing on ATV Channel. But not so close, not this close. I looked up and it stared straight at me with its round white eyes. I touched it and felt its white skin cold and smooth. I flung my arms around its neck to feel its stillness and mildness.

"Uncle Ying, why is there a horse in your house?" I asked.

"Ha! A Dai-hup cannot live without a horse. It is his companion. It takes him to wherever he wants to go." He laughed. Then he walked and showed me his room.

Can you imagine what can be found in Uncle Ying's study? Long Chinese swords were hanging on the wall. A strange long robe was pinned on a board. Uncle said it was what a Dai-hup wore in his journey. Is it not boring to wear only one robe of dull grey and black colour? Perhaps Dai-hup gives all his money to the poor so he has no money left to buy a new robe for himself. Dai-hup must have to sacrifice a lot. His bookshelves were crammed with Mo-hup novels<sup>2</sup>. I read their Chinese titles. I had not learnt some of the Chinese characters, but they sounded interesting. One was called "The Legend of a Vulture-Hunting Hero? Another one was titled "A Flying Fox in Snow Mountain" Uncle Ying showed me his collection - Mo-hup novels, comic books, movies and other stuff that Dai-hup used and wore. My uncle's big black eyes twinkled when he explained to me his history of collecting the books and stuff. To please my dear uncle, I borrowed some of the novels from him and smuggled them into my bedroom. My mother would beat me with a duster if she knew I read Mo-hup novels. It appears to me that she hates Mo-hup novels.

The more I read, the more vivid the answer is before my eyes. I stare at the white wall in my bedroom and see a boy, holding a long sword, dash like a flash of lightning and fight against the hairy bears waving their axes and hammers. Suddenly the image dissolves to the boy, riding a white horse, who sprinkles the golden coins to the crowds of villagers who welcome him with deafening hails, like the time when Julius Caesar entered the city of Rome. The mesmeric portraits of a hero keep flashing before my eyes. It is my mother who wakes me up with her powerful slipper-slap on my head. I dare not tell her about what I think. What should I do so that I can become a real Dai-hup? Can you imagine if I put my uncle's Dai-hup robe on? Weird isn't it?

\* \* \*

Monday, November 10, 2003

Dear Diary,

Today I am so proud of myself! I believe you will feel the same after listening to what I tell you.

As usual, I left the house at 7:45am to catch the minibus, or I would be late for school. I had never been late before. Before I crossed the road, I saw a white-haired woman sitting on the floor. Some oranges were scattered around her, and one was still rolling towards a telephone booth. Her speckled bony hand was clutching a red plastic bag and she was struggling to get up. I looked around and saw nobody around. I thought, "Here's the chance!" I rushed to her and held her bony arm so that she could stand up with ease. I found her plastic bag was broken. What should I use to hold the oranges? Any cheap plastic bag? I searched my schoolbag but only found my Mickey Mouse bag. My dear grandfather gave it to me as my Christmas present last year, and it had not worn out yet. I heard a voice echoing in my head, "Give it to her." I also heard a howl protested, "No! Don't!" The two voices kept arguing with each other. I thought now I was put to the test of being a Dai-hup. Dai-hup had to sacrifice himself to help the needy. So I put the oranges into my (now it is her) Mickey bag and thrust it in her hand. Can you guess what she said? She said, "Thank you, you're really a good boy." A gush of joy overwhelmed me.

I HELPED SOMEBODY!

I don't believe others will do the same, right? Don't you think now I'm a hero?

\* \* \*

Tuesday, November 11, 2003

Dear Diary,

Let me tell you a secret. Don't tell Mum and Dad, ok?

This evening after school, I planned to go to the shopping center near the school. I wanted to see if the shops had a miniature of the white horse I saw in Uncle Ying's house. Of course I dare not



ask my mother for money. I can never fool her or hide anything from her. Her X-ray eyes can read even the deepest part of my mind. I believe it is the power of a mother. If I tell her the truth, she will be mad like a fresh shrimp jumping in a fry pan. I don't wish to die so soon.

On my way, I walked past a back alley. It was wet and dark. Trash was spilling out from black plastic bags. Cockroaches were toddling to the drains and rats strolling along the drainpipes. Not many students, girls in particular, like to come into this back street, but it was the fastest way to get to the shopping center. At the end of the street, I saw a beggar. He looked so shabby! He was sitting on a broken dusty wheelchair. The two metal handles were covered with rust. Mosses and molds grew on the wheel tyres. The sponge inside the black cushion was squeezed out and little insects were climbing out of it. The beggar's head was nearly as bald as an egg, with only a few grey hairs lying on his head. He wrapped himself up with pieces of black ragged cloths, which were covered with white and brown stains. His dark brown claw-like hands lay still on his thighs. His head drooped. I could not see his face.

In front of him stood a light red plastic cup with a faded Mickey Mouse cartoon print on it. A silent plea for money. I took out my purse. Today Mum had given me twenty dollars and I had used three dollars and fifty cents to buy Vita Soya Milk, so there were sixteen dollars and fifty cents left. My eyes wandered between my purse and the red cup. How much should I give him? Fifty cents? A dollar? Suddenly I remembered the boy who sprinkled the golden coins to crowds of people in one of the Mo-hup books. Sometimes a Dai-hup had to sacrifice himself to help others. I poured all the coins into his cup, and the dull chink-clink sound woke him up. He only whispered a "thank you" Actually I expected something more than that. I bet he must be too weak and hungry to speak more than three words.

\* \* \*

Wednesday, November 12, 2003

Dear Diary,

I ran into that beggar again. Do you think he was waiting for me?

I gave him all my money again. This time he looked up and I saw his face. He was a plain old man, but his eyes his eyes were as tiny as the eyes of a rat. He stared at me for a few seconds and I thought I saw something in his eyes, but I could not understand what it was. I suddenly felt

uncomfortable. I left the dark alley as quickly as possible.

Tonight I was so absorbed in thought that I did not notice I picked up some ginger strips with the fish. I was not aware of it until I was surprised to hear no yelling or shouting. I looked up and saw my mother give me a quizzical look. Well, to my surprise, the ginger strips did not taste as bad as I had thought.

\* \* \*

5: 47 pm. Thursday, November 13, 2003.

Ah-Hung had to stay after school to attend a tutorial class. By the time he left school, the sky already turned dark. Was the beggar still waiting for him? He hurried his steps to the back alley. He clutched his purse tightly with his hands. The coins clinked against one another as he run.

He turned around the corner and saw the old beggar yawning. Just before Ah-Hung could wave his purse and run to the beggar, he was shocked with what he saw.

The old beggar stood up from his wheelchair and walked away.

Ah-Hung froze. His mind numbed with shock. He slowly turned his head and spotted Pork Choi standing on the opposite side of the road, looking at him, with his usual smirk. Ah-Hung suddenly remembered tomorrow was Friday, a day they would meet again.

1 A Chinese idiom. Here Uncle Ying promises not to let anybody hurt his nephew.

2 Mo-hup: Transliteration from Cantonese. Mo-hup novels are novels featuring Dai-hups. Usually they are the best warriors and perform martial arts skillfully to fight against the evil and help the needy.



*'Self – Portrait'*, a painting of Chow Chun Fai  
Department of Fine Arts, CUHK, 2003