



C U Writing
in English

-Volume XVIII/2019-

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in **E**nglish

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Preface (Short Story Section)

If we were to choose a word that concludes the reading and writing experience, it would be 'catharsis'.

There must be times when high tides of emotions suffocate us, like when the water merely comes below your chin, and you tip-toe back and forth trying to avoid being pushed back again and again to the shore. But then the wave is rearing up towards you and finally it is too big that shove you towards the sea bed. You tried to stand up again to get a gulp of air but another wave splash over you and the water surges up your nose, shooting straight to your brain. Choking.

Astonishment, frustration, humiliation may you find in the stories and in life. But through tears and laughter after reading and writing the stories, we can cry and laugh away the melancholy and absurdity among ourselves, returning to a state of calmness where water, air and earth can be seen as what they truly are, as if you are sitting on the sand all alone, with the delicate silky sand wrapping around your bare feet, and the bubbly waves swishing on and off the shore, the breeze twirling around your hair, watching the endlessly expanding horizon. This, is the feeling of catharsis -- how work of art can heal our emotions.

The idea of how stories can heal our emotions was never apparent until we had the experience of being both a reader and a writer. As readers, we learn how to appreciate every work of art, in which the emotions involved sometimes stir up and echo our own experience in life. As writers, we perceive writing as a form of dissection. There are certainly moments in life when emotions, be they good or bad, overwhelm us. In order to capture these moments, we are to recall them again and again, until we can put them into simple words of sublime which our own growth in these emotional journeys is transcended. This is when writers have their moments of the realization of true self and the release of emotional burdens. Only through reading and writing, can we give value to rationality and emotions. And this has become especially significant when this section was edited, the city was flooded with fear and rage this summer, with sunlight blocked, leaving us in darkness.

Each story that you are going to read tells a story behind the writer. We hope you, as a reader, at some point as you are reading, will have moments of empathy and reflection, and might even have your first experience of catharsis.

By Chan Chun Hay Walter
Chan Yin Ha Denise
Wong Cheuk Lam Charmaine

“Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumcised spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?”

Woolf, Virginia. “Modern Fiction.” In The Common Reader, 150. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1925.

Preface (Poetry Section)

Most of us, if not all of us, enrolled in the creative writing course desiring to know how to write a poem. Contrary to the popular notion that the writing of poems requires whimsical inspiration, we've come to know through this course that the prerequisite of writing poems is actually practice. We need to constantly engage in the process of dissecting others' poems, using others' poems as templates for our own writing and editing our own work to ensure the precision of words.

That being said — poetry, similar to other forms of writing, is a form of expression. Hence, the poems are not merely impersonal outcomes of mechanical practice but rather, they showcase how we find our own voices and express our own styles through constant writing and editing. That is why, in this volume of CU writing, you will find many different takes on even the same topics: the state of being in Hong Kong, the questioning of the future, the quest for one's roots, the hopeless romantic crush.

All the poems were compiled and edited in June 2019, a time when young people's need to be heard was unprecedentedly urgent. We hope these poems can act as one of the many channels through which us young people can make our voices heard and we hope you will enjoy hearing what we have to say as much as we enjoy sharing it.

By Chan Chun Fan Nick
Bianca Rose Tio Reyes
Angie Kong

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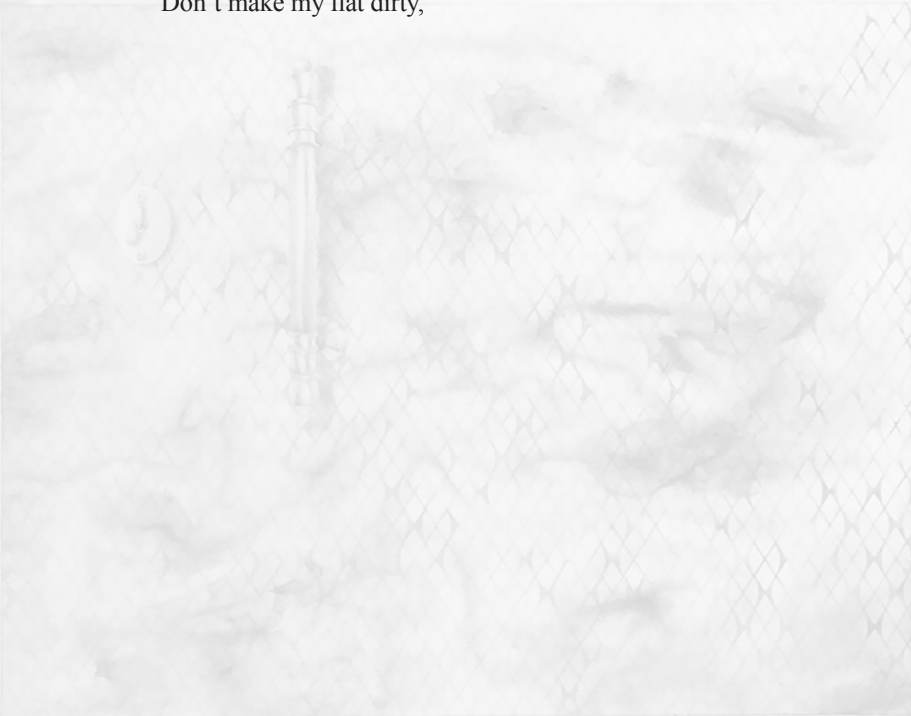
Short Story

Random Tragedy: Stories of daily life

“He knocks harder. Why isn’t he answering?”

“Feeling terrified, she heard a loud bang sound, as the two bottles of water fell and hit the ground hard.”

“Don’t make my flat dirty,”



Red

By Tamara Yustian

“I am from Indonesia, currently studying Mechanical and Automation Engineering. I enjoy walking around, getting lost in more ways than one, and writing about it. More of my writings are available in my blog called iamastraytuna over in Wordpress.”

He knocks on the door of the small, decrepit house. The lights are off, except for one. Yellow light spills from the highest window onto the road. A small balcony accompanies the room, making the shadows look like a prison waiting to be broken, beckoning silently for someone to break through the lines.

The lamp is bright in the midst of the dark neighbourhood. It is the only sign of life in the dead silence of the street. He knows there was only one person living here, after weeks of stakeouts. The neighbours are gone as usual for their tradition of Thursday nights. It’s not surprising considering how young the couple on the left are, barely in college, still head over heels for one another. Like all the other marriages, it won’t last forever. Death will do them part.

The house on the right is empty. There was never any movement, besides the occasional creaks from the howling wind. It’s a perfect hideout. From the vines creeping up from the edges of the house and the cracks on the walls, no one bothers to knock or send in random mails. No one would think a living soul is inside.

Well, he is not a living soul anymore. Merely a vessel for greater works.

He knocks harder. Why isn’t he answering? Usually, there is the impending sound of hurried feet, followed by a small crack of the door opening. Then, he would let his charm take over. Broken down car, a new neighbour who just moved in - any excuse from his exhaustive list

paired with his sweet smile and downturned eyes. No one could resist him. No one has survived him.

Curious. Perhaps the owner is occupied? What exactly could he be doing that keeps them from answering the door? He grasps the doorknob and turns his wrist. The door creaks open. The noise is loud in the dark. He squeezes his way in, carefully looking at both ends of the street. It won't do if anyone notices him or the door opens. He has to be a ghost.

He could have waited and knocked all night. He is nothing but full of patience. In his line of work, to achieve this art form, patience is key. He couldn't have gotten far without waiting and watching life ticking away. But he doesn't have all night. To let everything go smoothly, he has to be in and out before midnight. The young couple may be back at any point in time by then. He couldn't risk being seen by another living soul. Anonymity - shifting like a shadow is how he has survived for so long.

Silently, he closes the door and lets his eyes adapt to the dark. He knows that all of the row of houses have identical layouts. He walks through his own in the dark countless times to know his way around, but the furniture or other unidentified objects may pose a problem. Careful not to make a sound, he slowly lifts his foot, puts his heel down first and toes last and takes another step like that, and another, and more.

He can almost see the beginning of the bannister leading upstairs when his right hand knocks against something and it *rattles*. And it starts rolling. His instinct quickly leads him to the sound and his hand clasps the object down. Straining his ear, he listens for any indication of a presence in the house. There maybe a shuffle, footsteps or a confused grunt, but is nothing.

Strange. This is the strangest case he has ever seen. He is used to being a stranger, a loner, a shadow, yes, but that is because he has

trained himself to be so. And he is so. Unnoticeable, unremarkable, he blends into the crowds, one as the walls. But even then, when he is bowing his head down and hiding his flitting eyes under his cap. One or two would catch his eyes. They would be captured at the moment for one beat, two beats, and move on. Never has he crossed paths again until he deems it right to do so, when it is time to find the next victim.

And when he is silent in the alleyways, meditating with the distant hustle and bustle of the city, plotting his moves, drunks or a sex-crazed couple would stumble into his lair. He is carefully hiding behind a dumpster or a slight rise of bricks, not making a sound. There is no need for them to recognise his presence. But when he wants them to, it is deliberate. He is in control. A squeak of his shoe on the gravel or a tap of his fingernail on the cement is enough for them to turn their heads away from each other, enough to make them stop and stare. He wouldn't be able to look around the corner without blowing his cover, but he could imagine their faces and smell their fear. He will relish in the power and control that he has from instilling those chills down their spine. Listening to the hushes and whispers spilling from their lips, *almost* feeling their tremors and trembles through the air, is absolutely satisfying.

But this? This is downright odd. He doesn't hear anything. He doesn't hear a gasp nor an audible flinch. No one comes down to entertain him. His target is nowhere in sight. All he sees is the shadows, the light, and how elusive the situation is. He doesn't know what is happening. This has never happened to him at all. This is most definitely not part of his plan.

By this point in time, he should have been drawing lines on a skin, fishing blood out with his knife, his steady hands dipping into the red and painting over the walls and floors, pleas and screams filling the room with its crescendo. He remembers his favourite - number Eight - with her gentle whimpers and bright eyes. She wasn't as vocal as Four. She might as well be the quietest among all, but the fear in her eyes

resonated. He could feel her trembling beneath his blade, the ropes cutting into her skin, making their own lines. The gorgeous patterns on her skin were ingrained in his mind. He had never taken a photograph for any of his paintings. He couldn't risk having any evidence, but damn, if he wasn't so close to breaking his own rule at that time. He drew a flower near her head, just to commemorate the occasion, her favourite thing in this world. Her house was filled to the brim with those stems and petals.

A squeal jolts him out of his thoughts. He looks down and notices that his hand has squeezed the object and it nearly buckles down under the pressure. Releasing the tension from his body, he lets it go and inspects it.

It's a bottle, a bright-coloured cylinder encapsulated by an equally bright top. There seems to be a handful of pills inside, which had caused the rattling sound. Intrigued, he twists it open and fishes one out to his open palm. The capsules are in 2 different colours. They contrast each other. A word is written on one side: Prozac.

Prozac.

That name sounds familiar. It tickles his mind. He has seen it before. He remembers it was written in a scrawny handwriting on a piece of folded up paper. The edges and creases had been worn out, as if someone had opened it and folded it all up again and again, as if sweaty hands had grasped it tightly, leaving it damp. He remembers it was lying on his parents' nightstand on his mother's side.

He has never found out what it meant or what happened to that piece of paper because the next day. It was gone. It wasn't there anymore. Maybe his mother had gotten rid of it. Or maybe the pills had gotten rid of his mother a long time ago, because she had never been there in the first place. He had never felt a speck of living soul in her. That must be why he had never had one, either.

His mother floated around the house, with her unseeing eyes. He wondered before, whether she knew he existed or if she was aware of her own existence. He can't remember a time when they had a meal together, let alone proper food that weren't scraped together from leftovers. He doesn't know what it meant to walk into a house and feel warmth. All he knew was grime and stench welcoming him home. He only remembers a time when he saw her drawing lines over her own skin, and when he asked why, she said, "They want to get out. I want to get out."

That's the only story he has of her. The next time when he saw her doing it again, the lines were deeper. Her voice got hoarse and she said, "I'm so sorry. I can't do this anymore." So she left him there in the grimy tiles of their bedroom, with nothing but her blood and her tears. He waited and waited for her to wake up, while drawing on papers with his pencil, but she never did. The red stood out among the tiles, so he started painting with it, in the hope that she'll say something against it. She never spoke a word.

He wishes she did. He wonders if she'll be proud of him now, if she thinks he is using his life well now, freeing souls and creating art from them, just as he did with what she left behind.

His mind whirls at the possibilities of why these pills are here. What is its function? Why is it here? Is it the same as his mother's?

He doesn't need to think about this. There is no time for dwelling in the past now. Pushing all those thoughts away, he returns everything to its original position, to where it belongs and resumes his trajectory towards the stairs.

Walking up as silently as possible, his ears perk up in the deafening silence of the house. There isn't a single peep coming from that room with the lights on. The door stands out in the dark and begs him to come

in.

He doesn't bother to knock or wait; it's a moot point. No one might have heard him at all, judging from before. He quickly opens the door and steps in. And the smell hits him first, a smell he knows very well. The metallic tinge fills the air and he can taste it at the back of his throat.

There he is. The next one, number sixteen, is lying on a red cot. And it's not a natural red.

It's blood. There is so much blood on the floor. The room isn't that big, but the floor is almost fully red. His eyes slowly scour the room. The source of this bloody floor is lying slumped on his bed. There is nothing other than Sixteen himself.

This isn't right. Is someone else targeting Sixteen? Yet, he doesn't see anyone else watching him during his stakeouts. Is the possibility the universe aligns so perfectly that two people are planning to kill one person in a city this high? Surely, that's preposterous.

His feet take him to the bedside. His boot soles and knees are slick with blood. The flood just seems to be never ending. He crouches, raises the tip of his first two fingers, touches the side of his neck, and counts. One, two, three, four, five, si-

There. A heartbeat. He is still alive.

But this is not part of his plan. He's not here to finish someone else's job. He is here to do his own job. He is here to watch Sixteen gurgle on his own blood and drown. Not to be checking his pulse and cleaning up all this mess.

As he looks for clues on who it might be and how he escaped, something gleams from the corner of his eye. Something small and silver. It is right next to Sixteen's right hand. A razor.

No. This is not an outside job. There is no one else in this scene but the two of them. His eyes roam around his arms and sure enough, parallel lines are deeply etched on his left wrist, just as his mother was in that bathtub.

This is Sixteen's own doing. He isn't a part of this at all.

He always targets random people that he saw on the streets. He doesn't pick anyone that can be linked to him. All he does is to follow them home and watch their lives weekly. They are always vibrant and excessive lives that itch him the most. Alcohol, drugs, sex. If they so dearly want to damage their organs and die, he will gladly do a favor for them. He saw enough people in his own lives doing so and die. Why not help speed up the process for these people? But this, this he doesn't know. What does one do to someone who has already wanted to die in the first place? He couldn't help his mother. He wasn't a part of her plan.

"Help," he groans. His voice is weak and raspy. Barely opening his eyes, his pupils can't seem to focus on anything.

Help what? Help him to live? Help him to die? He can easily do that, but he obviously doesn't seem to need any help for dying. He'll die soon enough, if he just leaves him here now.

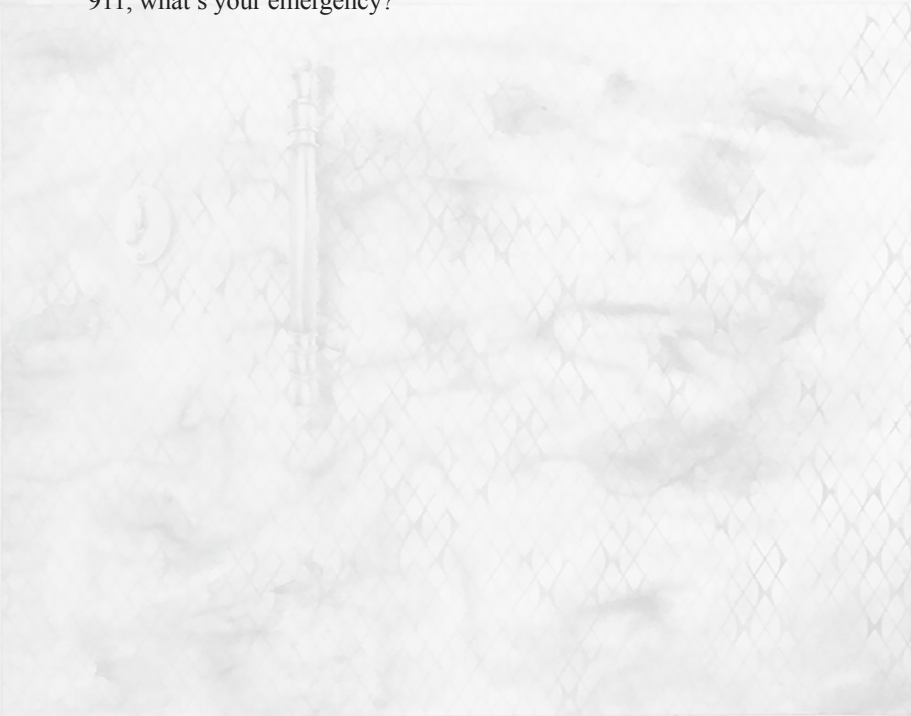
As if he can read his mind, he says, "No, I don't wanna die." He swallows. "I still want to try again. Let me live."

He wants to live. He wants to see the next day, the next sunrise, the next morning news. He has killed 15 other people and their begs and moans had never touched his heart. They are empty. They just loved life and loved themselves. But this man, lying on a bloody cot, wants to live. This man who is hopeless and tries to take business into his own hands, regrets. He has never seen this before. His mother never regretted. She didn't want to try again. Her son, her own flesh and blood, a life she gave birth to, didn't mean anything to her.

This is not his plan anymore. This is not his plan and has never been his plan. This is something else. He doesn't know what is happening. It scares him, yes, but this is bigger than his fear, than the shadows, than his numbers, than his art.

He takes his phone out of his pocket, raises it with his bloody hand, and calls.

“911, what's your emergency?”



Drowning

By Catriona Chow Sze Wa

“I remember the time when life was still a sweet fantasy. And it fell apart as I saw before me, an endless cycle of life. We have 52 weeks that we go to school or work 5 days and have the weekends off. It seems like we are nothing but a speck of dust in the grand scheme of everything; we are nothing but a bunch of puppets that are put in this cycle of randomness and repetition. I had my illusions shattered since the day I realized the futility of life. And I knew that I was destined to lose many of the illusions I still retained. It was the same for everyone, to feel betrayed by life, sickened but powerless. So this story is not only about Olivia, but also us, surviving the disillusionment with life. And last of all, as Hemingway has said, ‘how much better to die in all the happy period of undisillusioned youth, to go out in a blaze of light, than to have your body worn out and old and illusions shattered.’ ”

Someone once told Olivia that when you dream about someone, that person is thinking of you. And now she was instantly reminded of this statement. *Is my daughter missing me?*

On this ordinary night, Olivia lay in bed with her eyes open in the dark, expressionless and rigidly immobile. She stared at the ceiling so hard that it seemed her eyes could burn holes right through the concrete slab and see the invisible. Her eyes were locked on the ceiling; yet her mind wandered through the world and flew straight to the sky, in search of the lost one. Thinking about her daughter who lived in a castle on a cloud, she could not help but shed tears.

My little sweetie Emma, are you truly dead? Why do I dream about you every night? In all of these dreams, you went to the same place, made the same gestures, and said the same thing. Why don't you even try hard to deceive me? Why don't you stay with me?

Although it had already been almost a year since the calamity struck her, Olivia still felt emotionally overwhelmed. It was poignant

and painful, and this pain had never left or got any better; instead it was buried deep inside of her. She was broken, with illusions shattered and everything fallen apart, beyond all hope of healing. For all these days, she could not get a good night's sleep at all. Whenever she closed her eyes, Emma's figure would appear in her head, standing and smiling brightly. Emma looked exactly like what Olivia had imagined her to be: she had her father's chocolate brown hair, her nanny's almond shaped eyes, as well as a button nose and Cupid's bow that belong to Olivia. She was, Olivia thought, such a ravishing sight in the glittering pink frock that was unworn but bought long ago. *This is my daughter, my greatest pride and blessing.*

As Olivia was recalling her memories about Emma over and over again, a sense of tiredness attacked her, and she fell asleep without even knowing it...

"Mama, don't you feel happy for me? I finally come out of your stomach!" Emma grinned from ear to ear and said cheerfully. "It was so dark in there. And I was so bored, with the limited space, the heartbeat sound, the dreary round of sleeping, swimming and trying to snort... Basically everything! It felt like I was staying in a dungeon for endless days. Luckily it didn't take much time for me to break out of it."

Olivia gently held her lovely daughter Emma and looked at her, astonished by her ability to speak right after she was born. Her face, brilliant and beautiful, was lifted toward Olivia; and in that position, Olivia examined her facial features inch by inch with concentration, in the hope that the image would be engraved in her memory.

While she might not know how others feel when they first see their babies, for Olivia, seeing her precious little girl for the first time was like meeting an old friend she knew. There was a strange feeling of familiarity, subtle but strong, coming from deep in Olivia's brain, in which a vague, mysterious consciousness that told her neither the scene nor the dialogue was entirely new attacked her. Sweating and shivering,

she felt like she had been in the same circumstance as at the present moment, once or many times before. It was as if she could anticipate Emma's move and that part of the conversation even when they had not yet taken place. And oddly, she suddenly missed Emma being in her belly although she was right there. It just appeared to her that she might have lost something very important.

Feeling a little pained and confused, Olivia stared at Emma for so long, trying to process this growing sense of oddness that came from nowhere. Yet, as soon as she saw Emma's cute smile, she then decided not to think much as she felt so happy for the fact that she became a mother for the first time.

Just imagine—you could hear her voice, hear her coming up the steps and walking through the door; hold her in your arms, take her on your knee to play, dress her in tiny clothes, see her smile as you tickled her toe, and maybe sit and talk with her... How blessed am I to be given such a great gift.

Many said being a mother of a newborn is the hardest job in the world. Olivia did hesitate a bit, thinking that she might not be ready for it. But to her surprise, it wasn't as intense as she had imagined. Emma was growing up so fast that even the doctors were puzzled. Right before she reached the age of twelve months, this girl could already walk and run and jump. Whilst Olivia didn't want to study this unusual phenomenon, it significantly reduced her stress as a new mother, and she could confidently say that everything went smoothly for her. She seemed to be fully ready for every challenge that came with the baby so suddenly and quickly, especially when she was even able to clean up the house and make dinner for the whole family every day, which was simply amazing, according to her mother Susan. Still, what was the most amazing of all was that Emma fulfilled Olivia's dream—she was everything Olivia wanted and dreamed her to be.

Emma grew up happy, cheerful, and energetic, similar to any

other children in the world. Olivia loved to watch Emma sleep and listen to her gurgling. No matter how stressed she was, the moment Emma's eyelids dropped, she would stay and watch. And it was in these moments Olivia witnessed Emma growing up—she was a baby then a toddler then kindergarten age.

As time passed, the first ever birthday of Emma came quickly. In order to celebrate the birth of her little girl, Olivia took Emma to the beach. Dressed in her Sunday best, Emma hummed a light-hearted tune as she skipped down the street. She even did a little caper or dance, which almost made Olivia stagger to her feet, swaying slightly. When they walked up to the shoreline, other boys and girls rushed past them to push their way through the crowd. Emma, who had been waiting for this day for so long, was eager to make new friends and play with the water. So she pushed her way in, too, and didn't look back. She flung Olivia's hand away and sprinted to the edge of the sea; and she ran so fast that Olivia could not even catch her.

Having tried to grab hold of Emma but in vain and being blocked by the crowd, Olivia slowly walked along the beach and sat under an umbrella. She lingered in the spot, enjoying the warm sunlight and the clear sight of Emma. A lot of kids were there, including Emma, who successfully blended into the group, and Olivia watched them running, doing jumps, and having fun. Right there, she saw a sight that warmed her heart and made her chuckle a little bit.

The children were having a water fight on the beach. With a bucket of water, Emma attacked and soaked a boy. But then, just in the moment when she smiled gleefully, feeling smug after her win, a girl snuck up behind her and poured a full bucket of water over her head, which made her wet from head to toe. The kids looked at each other, all being a complete mess. It was hard to tell who started, or it may happen that they laughed spontaneously, still the joy written all over their faces could make the hardest hearts melt, including Olivia's.

Life has never felt so good for me. She thought. Although Emma has been growing up to be so independent sometimes, and I kind of miss the little girl who still wants to hold my hand and gives me random hugs and kisses, it is just fascinating to see her become the intelligent, capable, and sweet individual I always prayed she would be. I wish I could freeze time just as it is, so that this moment would last forever. And now, I finally understand, being a mother truly is the hardest job ever.

It is so precious and bittersweet...

Suddenly, she heard a voice in her ear calling, which interrupted her thoughts—

“Olivia, wake up! Are you having a nightmare again?”

She looked around suspiciously, but there was no one around her. Thinking that maybe she was just too tired, Olivia gave a low gurgle of laughter, ignored the voice and focused once again on Emma. Not long after she got back to the business of observing her lovely daughter who smiled brightly in the sun, Emma, being completely drenched, walked towards her.

“Mama, I am so thirsty, can I have a drink please?” Emma asked with a silvery voice. She was completely drenched, in water or sweat—Olivia couldn't really tell because she looked as if she had just bathed—and she ran one hand through her hair, further disheveling it. Olivia felt a dull ache seeing Emma being worn out, so she crouched down and wiped the sweat off her face.

“Let me see...” Olivia stood up, trying to check whether there was any shop nearby. Then, she found a small grocery shop near the beach and said to Emma, “Go play with your friends and I will be right back.”

In the hope of getting back to Emma as soon as possible, Olivia

rushed into the shop with feverish haste and took two bottles of water at once. Yet, when she was paying the money, instead of telling her how much it cost, the shopkeeper murmured, “Olivia, wake up! Wake up!”

She was shocked, so she threw down the money, without asking for change, and hurried back to the beach. But when she returned to the spot, the beach was so empty that there was literally no one around her. Emma was missing, and she could not see her anywhere.

Feeling terrified, she heard a loud bang sound, as the two bottles of water fell and hit the ground hard. It is only then she noticed her hands started trembling. Leaving the water on the ground, Olivia ran across the beach and looked for her daughter Emma like a crazy woman. Still, she could hear nothing other than her shouts and the sound of waves crashing on the shore. The laughter of Emma died and there was only silence.

It all happened in the blink of an eye as Olivia seemed to see her daughter struggling in the water. For a moment her mind went completely blank, when she finally pulled herself together, she was already in the sea, swimming tirelessly, hoping to find Emma while feeling scared to see her drowned.

“Emma! Emma! Wait for me!” Olivia growled, with her tears flowing down her face. At this moment, she already knew it.

Her daughter was drowning in the water so far away from her; all she could do was to witness the event...

Emma might have screamed, but the sea pulled her, grabbed her, and stuffed her under water. The sea hit her, turned her, ripped off her clothes. Water flooded the lungs, and she lost the breath to shout anymore. The clock was running down now. Emma was in no position to fight her way back up to the surface. And then it hit her again, and she was beneath the billows.

She was dying. Olivia could almost see it and feel it herself. There is only a deep, cold and watery grave, and she remains in her watery grave forever.

In Olivia’s mind, this sea turned into bloody red all of a sudden, sticky and sickly stinky, just like the drops of blood when she suffered miscarriage at the beginning of the year. The thick, dark red liquid ramped and roared furiously. And Emma, sinking into the bloody sea, vanished without a trace.

“Olivia, you should wake up!”

Who’s calling? Why do I keep hearing my name?

She was the one drowning. But there was no one there to rescue her.

The Winter Beach

By Sharon Aretas Ng

Thank you, F.S. Fitzgerald.

You are always my biggest literary idol.

Your words are the beacon in the hall of my heart.

I am not a princess, I am a Queen. So are you.

For better or worse the winter monsoon had driven off the usual goers. What was left on the winter beach were those with a purpose clearly not keen on getting soaked. Striped umbrellas scattered on the endless shoreline like dead ants dotted on a clean white tile. For her, the winter beach was the perfect destination nourished with every romantic detail she needed. The yellowing sunlight put away the pink flush on her cheeks. Every sun-reflecting starlight in her eyes was a mere trick. She casually threw her sandals on the dry grassland.

Suddenly, that gesture made aware to her that a wild daisy field was not far on her left. The whole patch stood innocently against the beach. Aimlessly moving towards the field, she saw each petal trying violently to shine through the yellowing light, each as white as they could blind her and so her impulse made her kill one of them. At least, on her way of wandering, she thought, she could have something lively, or were once lively with her. She cling to the death tightly within the grip of her two fingers and embarked along the shoreline.

On the right she had the salt kissing her toes; on her left the evening chills had already cooled down the hot sand for her. Imbalanced it was, but nothing too extraordinary to wake her inner self up. As her feet slipped into the accelerating water, her mind swam into what happened throughout her course of relationship. Her mind was making her do things: the mindless motion of eternally tearing the parasitic petals off their host.

‘OK. One petal at a time.’

At his promotion party. I forgot to buy extra beers for him. That was one nasty seashell. 12 isn't enough apparently. Never mind. My bad definitely my fault the petal isn't staying. Like he said he was tired from working and facing his boss, and I could have been more considerate. I work too. I should know how that feels. Boss and lab work. No I don't know about lab work. But still. More considerate. I should have bought everything he needed. More considerate. I am just not thinking for him enough.

One fault cost one petal.

That time that time also. What was it? Why are things living on the edge of my mind that I can't think? Think think think think think. I like wearing black, why can't I just wear pink or shit to make him happy? Jesus, if I don't even have pink stuff or anything in other vibrant colours, I should have bought some. Why can't he just like me for wearing black? Not because he is upset, he is always upset whenever I put on a black item because my colours depressed him. Black reminded him of his first job. At the supermarket. Cashier uniform. And he never liked pleasing someone's ass. I should have worn more colours to please him, it was what I could have done to save us.

Two petals gone.

Why am I feeling this acute pain in my fingers? I hate this pain, I hate this. No, wait, I am reflecting and reflecting is good right? Why must I always talk to myself? Stop looking at me and you two should probably get lost before the chills hit you.

Again! This is why he said he can't be with me. I don't tolerate other people even if they don't make me feel uncomfortable. I don't have patience! Does not wanting to tolerate make me sensitive? Make selfish? He said he doesn't like me being so sensitive. I am sensitive but I merely wanted to do a movie night on our anniversary. Does that make me needy? Maybe he doesn't want to watch movies. Haha,

maybe he didn't even want to spend time with me. As usual. Leaving you to 'your stuff', hoping to be completely independent out of a relationship. That's not possible! I should stop blaming myself for that. Not liking a sensitive person but hoping for a considerate girlfriend. How impossible! Him! No no no, this is where I am wrong, if he had not wanted to spend time with me during the entire week, as a good girlfriend I should have left him alone. Now he is using this against you. My bad.

Visitors were retreating for dinner. Dead ants wiped off the white tile. The winter monsoon began to hit the shore again. Her gasp at the sudden realisation of a real world out there from her mind scared the nearby people.

Sigh. I need to stop. NO. Hey. I know, I know, I know. No, I know nothing. If I know things he wouldn't have that look in his eyes. Why can't I just know things like things about how he feels. Now I will never know how he felt back then. But I want to know. I won't know I am too dumb. Yes I am too dumb like he said. If I were smart I would have been working at a lab, like him. Dumb people like me sweep the lab's floor. But I am too dumb to even be qualified to sweep his floor.

To see the white petal dissolving into the sea. The remaining ones were powerless against the evening rain of colours. What was once white became blue. What was once blue became black.

Really not a thing, just one thing I am good enough throughout? He must have complimented me or anything or lied or betrayed me at some point. I know. No, I don't know because I am dumb and stubborn. I don't know why he had to hug that girl in the nightclub. I don't know why he had to go to the nightclub. I DON'T KNOW I DON'T KNOW! I don't like the way he argued his way out but yes he needed the break from his lab work. I gave him that, not being sensitive and be as considerate as I could be, I gave him that. I could still eat it all up but all of these after arguing with him and it was wrong. I should

have given him that without asking like he said he was drunk.

One petal left.

There must be something I have done right.

There must be there must be there must be at least one.

But this time she burst into tears. Recalling all the fond memories with her partner didn't only make her reminiscent of the romantic past, but also a deep guilt. She hurt him. And it was true because all the petals were nearly gone. The night was hitting upon her head and she couldn't make things right. She desired above anything to keep that one petal left. She wanted to claim that because she had loved him immensely and selflessly, her defeat was glorious. She absolutely perfectly wanted to do so.

Not until the last hour when he said he is so fed up and want a way out of us. I fix nothing even though I am very willing very willing to be happy with him again. I am so sorry Edward for being such a terrible person and you have to be such a figure in keeping things okay between us, I am truly sorry. I am not good enough, I am never good enough for you, I could have been a better person, a better girlfriend and support you all the way in your lab research. Should I tear this petal away? No, something is not right. I know this time my heart is aching like hell, what the hell, I will keep this petal because, just because.

But it wasn't a 'just because'. She intuitively kept the petal because she knew this was a defeat and a win at the same time. There was one single thing she had done right, not for him, but for herself. Of all the emotional trauma on the inside she could hold. She could resist and mend herself if it was just a single invisible strike. But visible strike? Not so much. She doesn't sweep floors, not too dumb to know that the double strikes on both her skin and her heart would kill her sooner or later. So She kept her dual defeat and win and escaped from their apartment after he began striking her during their breakup.

Hero

By Mandy Chan Man Yuet

I am in the final year of my undergraduate studies, majoring in the double degree of English Studies and English Language Education. The writing of the short story was inspired by my personal experience and it shows the complicated relationships among the narrator's family members.

I had often secretly envied my peers who had fathers that were manly, knowledgeable, loving, and able to take good care of the family. My mother was the one who took the role of a father, like a superwoman. She was the main breadwinner while taking care of household chores. She paid for the flat we lived in. 'Never rent a flat,' she said, 'you need to have a flat of your own in this city.' My father had his own accounting company but it was my mother who bought the office and helped him with much of the accounting work. She earned a lot from stock investment. My father used to gather the speculations of financial analysts for my mother to make the judgement. For the rest of the time in his company, he conducted research on healthy recipes and watched television programmes on health. No oil. No salt. No fatty meat. No fried or sautéing food. No any food or drinks that may lead to cancer. More vegetables. More fish. Anything that could prolong his life or at least not die early. He also paid extra attention to news about people hit by a car or some crazy men slaughtering passers-by on the street with a knife. 'You could also die from stress, you know, not only cancer and these accidents,' my mother said.

My mother spent much more time on my elder brother than on me because he needed her to force him to do homework and study, while I was always one of the top three of the class without anyone's help. Every day when I came home from school, I went into my parents' room where I could do my homework on a small desk. The voice of my mother lecturing or scolding my brother came from the living room. During the weekends, my father usually brought me to his office to study. Most of the time, the company was quiet except for the sound of music or videos that he played on his computer. I took after my father – we had similar appearance and

personalities. Sometimes I felt like I knew what he was thinking even though he did not say anything.

My father went to the office even at the weekends to stay away from my mother, not because he disliked her, but because she disliked him. When we were all at home, my mother was always criticizing my father or complaining. 'I earn all the money and do all the housework. What do you do?' 'Your father almost went into jail for making false accounts for his client. Someone who does not know that he himself is an idiot would do that.' As she went on and on about it, my father just went into the washroom and took a shower or whatever long enough for my mother to finish her speech. He did that every time.

Once when I was ten, my mother came to my room. I was resting on my bed, enjoying a moment of serenity.

'Let me sleep on your bed tonight,' she requested. For some reason, I rejected. Her face darkened and said something like I was not a good daughter to my father. As if she had finally found the motive, she demanded a divorce with an air of triumph or relief. On that note, she left the room and went to the living room to help my brother with his homework.

My father hurriedly followed her and begged her.

'Don't leave, please...' She said nothing. He begged her again, his voice was shaky. She still said nothing. He turned to me.

'Go kneel down and say sorry to your mother,' he said, 'say you will not do it again.'

I stared at him. 'I did nothing wrong.' I said.

'Just go and say sorry.'

I wiped off my tears as I walked to my mother. She was instructing my brother to do homework. My father frantically motioned me to kneel. Slowly, I knelt down without looking at her and said, 'I am sorry, I will not be like this next time.'

There was a moment of silence. 'Let me show you how to do this equation,' said my mother to my brother.

My cheeks flushed as I continued to kneel before them. I cannot remember how long I kept that position. It felt like forever. I looked at my father, hoping to know what I should do next. He looked agitated as if he was just diagnosed with cancer.

A week or so later, they made up, probably after my father made some promises. I avoided looking at my father since then. I could understand his extreme fear of death, but I could not comprehend his fear of my mother, or more specifically, leaving my mother, so much that my feelings could be sacrificed. I wished that I were a grown-up so that I could walk out of this family. Sometimes I dreamed of a hero coming into my home and taking me away to somewhere filled with love and care.

One year after this episode, my brother began to study hard for the public examination. He had more homework and often worked in the living room after dinner. I was also preparing for my piano examination, and my father asked me to practise when my brother was studying. Only after I grew up that I understood my father wished me to fulfil his dream of being able to play the piano well. My brother complained and cursed sometimes, but I did not dare to stop. He hit me on the eyeglasses and broke them once, when I was practising and he was taking a rest. We often fought with each other when we were kids, but he seemed to grow more and more violent. It was hard to find a time that would not disturb him, so I tried not to disturb him too much. My father was unaware of his violence. In fact, he turned blind or deaf towards anything about my brother.

One night after we had fish and vegetables for dinner as usual, my brother took his textbooks to the dining table and started to study. My mother lay down on the sofa to take a rest. I was about to go back to my room when my father asked me to practise for the piano examination for a while. I glanced at my brother and slowly walked to the piano. When I opened the lid of the keyboard, he grunted and said, 'Can't you see that I am studying?' Startled, I removed my hand from the piano and looked at my father. 'Just go on,' he said.

I sat down carefully and placed my hands on the keyboard. As soon as I played the first note, a loud noise came from behind. I turned my head just in time to see my brother storming into the kitchen. A bewildered silence followed as all heads faced the direction of the kitchen. When my brother appeared at the door of the kitchen, the knife for cutting meat was in his hand. 'I am gonna kill you,' he said in a high-pitched voice, raising the knife. My mother sat up from the sofa and my father and I stared at him, unable to react. The next second I was conscious that my brother was speeding towards me, and reflexively I stood up and ran towards the other side of the room to the washroom, with a glimpse of my father yelling and running to my brother. I shut the door with my hands shaking and heart pounding fast. In the darkness, I heard my father telling my brother to put the knife down, the table being pushed against, feet swiftly moving across the wooden floor, my brother shrieking. I held the doorknob which lock had failed to work for a long time with all my strength. 'I am dying but I am still so young.' I thought, 'I have not even studied in a secondary school. I am going to miss my friends.' They will be so shocked and upset. 'Don't make my flat dirty,' my mother said as my father and brother continued to confront each other. Suddenly, I realized that I had only my father to rely on, my father whom I expected would run as fast as he could away from danger. I prayed that he would not get hurt because of me and that he would be able to stop my brother. I promised myself that I would not blame him again for making me kneel, if we both survived.

When I was not sure whether I could stand it anymore, I heard the door gate open and voices of two unknown men. Movements stopped abruptly. I edged towards the washroom door. After a while, one of the voices told me that I could come out. I cautiously opened the door. What came into my sight first was a small pool of blood on the floor and drips of blood on the exercise books on the table. My heart skipped a beat. Then I saw two policemen talking to my mother and my brother sitting on a chair, his wrist dripping blood.

‘It is okay now.’ I turned around at my father’s voice. He was fine, just had a cut on his thumb. I looked into his eyes and saw care, and love. In front of me was not the wimpy dad anymore, but a hero.

Watery Grave: Stories of memories

“Do you know what time is it?”

“It was already three in the morning and still, she was sleepless.”

“She doesn’t get up. She lays there and cries.”

The Drenched Lady

By Liu Ying Ying

“Born and raised in Hong Kong, Ying Ying Liu recently graduated from the Faculty of Law at CUHK. Writing mediocre screenplays, short stories and poetry the night before it’s due is her speciality. The Drenched Lady was heavily influenced by the crippling anxiety and slow descent into madness that all writers experience to varying degrees. You can find her at paper-chase.tumblr.com”

Have you ever had that feeling when you’re wandering around in a room, occupied with the most mundane thoughts, so occupied that you’ve completely forgotten why you’ve walked into this room? Susan was just thinking about what she was going to cook for dinner tonight. She still has some linguine left. Pasta is good. It’s perfectly alright to eat the same thing for three days in a row. Oh, but then that would mean driving out to the grocery store to grab pasta sauce. After all, she still has standards. She can’t just have plain linguine. But does she have time for that? Does she even have the energy? Does she really want to drive half an hour, an hour if there’s traffic, all the way into town just for some canned tomatoes? Decisions, decisions.

Oh wait. She has completely forgotten about Michael.

Michael wouldn’t like canned tomatoes and pasta would he? He likes variety. He’s a person who chooses the one thing he can’t pronounce in a menu, because “Why would anybody want to eat the same thing twice when you could potentially discover your new soul dish today?” Susan isn’t very sure why, it never turns out the way he hopes. There was one time he ordered some fancy French dishes which turned out to be raw beef and a very raw egg yolk to top it off. Maybe that’s why their marriage is going to shit. He picked Susan off a menu, someone new, someone he hasn’t tried, and probably thought, to hell with it, this might be his soul mate. But when the dish actually arrives and he’s had a taste and gotten over the novelty of it all, he decides he doesn’t want it after all and spits it out. So yeah, he probably wouldn’t

be very happy about having whatever Susan will be cooking. Then again, fuck that. If Michael doesn’t like whatever she’s making, he can make his own damn food.

Then something quite disorientating happens to Sarah.

“What was I doing?” she thinks to herself. It hits her like a slap on the face, or a downpour of icy water. A sudden and shocking jolt back to reality and it’s as if she has completely blanked out and become another person in those short few minutes where she’s possessed with Susan and her fictional dinner and marital crisis. As if, her soul has just momentarily detached from her body without her noticing as her train of thought runs further and further away from her and what she was doing until all of a sudden, her soul comes running back to her body or, maybe it’s the other way around. All her troubles forgotten and all she’s left with is “Why am I in this room? What did I want? What am I doing here?”

What was she doing?

Standing in her kitchen with the soles of her feet against the cold tiled floor, Sarah wonders, what had she come in the kitchen for? A drink? No, that’s not it. A snack? But she doesn’t feel hungry or even remotely peckish. She begins to take in her surroundings, there is just something about her kitchen that doesn’t feel right to her. She thinks harder, she must have walked in here to do something. But it’s like trying to remember a dream after she’s finally woken herself up and already on the way to her morning coffee. She knows that she dreamt, and that it had been a strange one. What was it?

What was she doing?

Sarah decides to retrace her steps, she treads back into her living room, up the creaky wooden steps and into her study. There her laptop and unfinished piece sit there, Susan’s marital crisis awaiting her

solution. Sarah isn't too sure how she's going to solve it yet. She's not too sure of anything really. Susan has been plaguing her for months, and she has explored every route, path, trail that her story could possibly take. None of them were good enough. Not enough conflict. Not enough self-driven change. Not engaging enough. Too narrative. Too passive. Too overdone. Too ambiguous. Sarah sighs, feeling quite deflated. She glances at the large red cross on her calendar, labelled underneath in red sharpie are the red letters "DOOMSDAY." Her editor will be properly pissed. With the publishers breathing down his neck, this is the last extension he can give her. She stands there for a few moments, still a little dazed. It's like trying to clasp onto quicksand. It's no use, it's gone. Quicksand in an hourglass. But it doesn't matter, surely if it was that important, it'll come back to her.

She forgets about the entire ordeal after diving into her work. Its dark by the time she resurfaces from her fictional world and back into her own. Sarah thinks she has finally got it. How to flesh out Susan and her story. How to create conflict and character-driven change and engage the audience and make it not narrative or passive and make her story *good* enough.

Susan is a middle-aged woman, distraught and traumatized by the loss of her mother, who died under mysterious circumstances when she was very young. Some people say she went crazy and drowned herself, others believe that the house is haunted, others think it was the husband who drowned her. Ever since her death, Susan has been haunted by a dark, female entity. The first time she sees her is the night after it all happened. She wakes, a little groggy at first, but is shocked to full consciousness at the woman standing at the end of her bed. She cannot make out her face, her long hair is drenched, so is her nightgown. One frighteningly similar to what her mother was wearing when her blue and bloated body was finally found. She doesn't scream. More like she can't. She's never slept well since. The first chance she gets, she runs far far away, and moves across the state. But then she gets news that her father has passed, who still lives at the house by the lake, she

refuses to go back. This event has driven them apart, she was brought up by her aunt. She was happy for a while, married, but she didn't want children but her husband, Michael, really wanted them. This causes an irretrievable rift between them so they get a divorce. Michael in this version of the story, isn't a complete asshole. Susan starts experiencing odd occurrences after the news. A strange female figure standing outside her house at night, then by her window sill, then finally, hover above her. Her wet hair dripping onto her face. She could see the water dripping off her hair, but strangely could not see her face, or at least, Susan can't remember what she looked like. It's funny, you'd think you'll scream after seeing something like that. But you don't. You can't. You can't do anything but stare. The drenched woman opens her mouth, and a loud, inhuman, piercing screech comes out.

Susan is jolted awake and decides its time to consult a psychiatrist. Who believes that its just all in her own head, and its a manifestation of her trauma which she has buried deep inside. It was a random tragedy, and devoid of a proper explanation and closure, her past, haunts Susan. Go confront your fears, he says. No, she says, I can't. You've never been there doctor, I don't expect you to believe me. Her doctor frowns, that's true. But see, neither have you, not since you were a child. I think if you go back and see your house on the cliff by the sea, and look at it, you'd just see a house. Susan contemplates this, staring up at the ceiling of her bedroom at another sleepless night. She decides that the doctor was right, enough of this. She gets up, dressed and into her car. Prepared to drive across the state in the middle of the night, possessed by a sudden surge of determination.

Sarah hasn't figured out what's to come after that. Not yet anyway. She's a little stuck on how she wants the story to progress from there. Should it be a happy ending, should she grant Susan the closure she has yearned for all her life, and finally free her from torture? Should it be an enticing thriller, turning out that at her childhood home she discovers evidence of her father having murdered her mother? What if the drenched woman turns out to be her dead mother, and the haunting

experienced by Susan serves as a symbolic metaphor representing Susan's guilt for not being able to save her? A little typical and expected perhaps, but it's the execution that matters.

Feeling like she is on a roll, which is quite rare, Sarah decides to call her editor for advice. Her editor groans, tells her to slow down and asks her if she knows what time it is. She says, no. He tells her, that it's fucking four in the morning, go to sleep Sarah, and hangs up. Sarah understands the struggles of those who have to make a living off a creative process and the short window in which she is blessed with inspiration, so she continues typing through the night. She spends the next few weeks, typing, deleting and retyping. Immersed in Susan's world, obsessed with creating conflict and character-driven change and engaging the audience and making her story not narrative or passive and hoping that her story is *good* enough.

Sarah hasn't gone out of her house in weeks.

Sarah hasn't eaten a proper meal or taken shower in days.

All Sarah does, is type, delete and type.

Sarah decides that the ultimate climax of Susan's story would play out like this. She reaches her childhood house on the cliff by the sea, it's a huge storm. A poetic echo of the night her mother died. She sits for a moment in her car, and decides she can't do this after all. It is then when she sees the drenched woman standing by the window, looking out from the house. Looking directly at her, watching her. Susan panics. Who wouldn't really? But her car doesn't start. A convenient plot device for creating tension. She decides to run. She looks back. The woman is following her. She screams for help. She has nowhere to go. She runs. Runs as fast as her two legs could take her, right off the cliff. Plunging into the sharp rocks and drowning at sea.

But the story doesn't end there. Rolling under the sea's waves,

Susan's life flashes before her. She sees her five or six-year-old self, staring back at her, the night of her mother's death. She sees her past self behind a window as she stares at her standing outside her own house. She sees her past self, awake with pure fear in her eyes as she stands by the window sill. Then finally, she sees her past self, stares straight up at her, whilst the sea water from her hair drips onto her cheeks. Susan opens her mouth, lets out a deep and guttural scream of anguish and horror as she realizes what has been haunting her this whole time. Herself.

Sarah wakes one night. For once she hasn't fallen asleep on her desk, she must have decided that she was going to take a short nap in her bed. She's groggy. Susan can wait. Sarah closes her eyes. She feels a drop of water against her cheek. By the second or third drop, she was awake again. Sarah wipes them off with the corner of her blanket, still half asleep.

Drip.

Another drop falls on her cheek. Sarah opens her eyes, looking up at the ceiling.

Hanging there, suspended, is herself. Her face a deep purple, as if all the blood had rushed to her head and suffocated. Skin is pale and has a sickly tone, devoid of all signs of blood running in her veins. Swollen, bleached and wrinkled. Body bloated and decomposed. Sarah can see the water dripping off her hair and the nightgown that clings to her body. Sarah doesn't scream. She stares at her. At herself. She watches the water drip off from her, and feels how it lands on her own cheeks. Sarah cannot move, her brain has frozen by pure fear. Sarah watches her mouth open, and out comes a loud, inhuman, piercing screech. So loud that Sarah awakes with a jolt. Then she screams. Screamed because she hit the floor and it startled her. Screaming because she has finally remembered that she can scream. She runs, tripping in the hall. She doesn't get up. She lays there and cries.

The Pocket Watch

By Asier Pérez Barreno

“I was born in Vitoria-Gasteiz, at the north of Spain. I have always been interested in short stories, I am a big fan of E.A. Poe. I have written ‘The Pocket Watch’ during my exchange in Hong Kong, and I have also studied in England, where the plot is placed.”

“I have always carried this pocket watch with me since my grandfather’s death. It was his last gift, on my 18th birthday, two months before he left us. At that time, I did not admire how beautiful it is. Its cover has been oxidized over the years, but some traces of that elegant silver can still be noticed. However, it looks like if the time had stopped since the moment he gave it to me if we look inside. The twelve silver Roman numerals are perfectly visible, with those two golden arrows in the middle and that white background that looks like a full moon. Our family name can be read just under the clock hands. I had never been a good student, so when I opened it for the first time, I felt very disappointed, as I did not know the Roman numerals.

— I can teach them to you. It’s very easy. Alexander, you’ll see. ‘Alexander’. He was the only person in the world who called me by my full name. Even my parents had always called me Alex. Alexander made me feel old and I had told him innumerable times to call me just Alex. But he went back to my full name once and again. It made me very mad to hear those nine letters together. It seemed like he wanted me to be disappointed.

— Sure, I am looking forward to learning those numbers from you.

My mother had always told me that we should be nice to our elders. Telling him what I was really thinking was not very appropriate at that moment, even if he had called me Alexander.

The pocket watch stayed in my desk drawer for two months and then it never went back to it. Now I can write any number you can

imagine in Roman numerals.

My schoolmates always told me that I was very lucky to have a grandfather, as most of theirs died during the war. However, I did not feel that way. In primary school, my friends and I used to stay playing football in the playground after class. While their parents were the ones in charge of taking care of them and taking them home, I was the only one whose grandfather came to the school. He would sit on a bench watching us play while all the parents stood chatting in a circle. Some of them would join the game and have fun with us, but my grandfather stayed in the same position until he felt it was time to go back home. Of course, I was always the first to leave. Then, we would take a couple of rests on our way home and sometimes got caught up by some of my friends, who did not need to take any.

But it was even worse in secondary school. All my friends were going back home on their own and always stopped at the kiosk to buy some candies, but my grandfather still walked to the institute every day to take me home. This made me upset, because it made me look like a child compared to my friends. The stops on our way home became longer and longer, and he used to tell me stories about the war and about his childhood. That is at least what my father told me after his death, as I did not really pay attention to the stories. I was only thinking about getting back home as soon as possible. He also told me that my grandfather met my grandmother during the war, and that she was the nurse who took care of him after being caught up by a German bullet. However, I never noticed that he had a scar on his shoulder. I would love to hear every detail of those stories from my grandfather, but it is too late for that.

One day, I decided not to wait for him when he made his first stop and I joined my friends in the kiosk, bought some candies and walked back home on my own. I did not hear about my grandfather until the following day. When he came again to pick me up in the institute, he brought some candies from the kiosk for me. I told him I did not like

the peppermint gum, but the strawberry one. And do you know what? He brought me strawberry gums every afternoon from then on until my graduation day in the institute.

Some people are afraid of death, clowns, spiders, or being trapped in an elevator... But my grandfather was afraid of life. And I was afraid of my grandfather until time made me stronger and he went weaker. 'Beware of' was his favourite phrase: Beware of the traffic light, beware of the steps, beware of strangers, beware of familiars, beware of the cold weather, beware of the hot weather, beware of the sunlight, beware of the darkness, beware of the dogs, beware of the cats, beware of the ovens, beware of those boys, beware of those girls, beware of sharp tools, beware of the fish spines, beware of the lampposts, beware of the doors, beware of the mosquitoes, beware of the rosebushes... And what I really needed to beware of was his sandals, which would hit me at the speed of light if I did not get off the bike going downhill to meet my friends. I was the only one who did that in town until the day Jake fell off his bike, hit the floor with his head and spent two weeks in the hospital. After that, some of my friends also started getting off the bicycle to go down that dangerous hill.

But what was really upsetting about him was his obsession with the war. He was always warning us about the possibility of a new war. He never wasted money and did not enjoy his retirement as he deserved."

— Grandpa, I need to get the charger of my smartphone. I'll be back in a minute.

— It's alright Elsa. Could you please bring me a glass of...? But she is gone. After a big effort, I get up and serve myself some water from the tap, as my grandfather used to do. You know, to save money for the bad times.

— Do you want me to take you back to the nursing home, Dad? I had not noticed that my son was in the kitchen, cleaning the cutlery.

— Not yet, I'm telling Elsa a story. I think you'll want her to know the ending, right? It's a very good story.

— Of course, but try to get to the end as fast as possible or you may need to sleep in the garden!

It is supposed to be a funny joke, so I laugh.

— I'd rather sleep in the garden than in that place full of crazy elders!

I say, and we both laugh, even though we know that I am telling nothing but the truth. I do not want to insist on that, but I know that it will get me more time to speak to Elsa.

In my walk back to the armchair I cannot hold my laugh. Not because of his joke or anything like that, but because I can imagine how mad my grandfather would get if the children would not help with the cleaning after having dinner: "I would like to see you in wartimes!" "What's going on with today's youth?" "You would not survive for five minutes on your own!" "I won't calm down until you clean the damned dishes". His surliness decreased during his last years, but it was easily noticeable that the word laziness was missing in his vocabulary.

I drop myself to the armchair and wait for Elsa. This is the first time I speak about my grandfather and his pocket watch. It is embarrassing to admit that my most valuable belonging pertained to someone I treated so badly. However, I am conscious that my memory is getting worse, and I want to share with Elsa the most important lesson I have ever learnt before it disappears from my mind. When I entered the nursing house, I used to try to remember what I had done during the day, but I gave up when I started having issues trying to remember what I had just eaten. It was very frustrating. However, the images of my grandfather seemed to be surprisingly fresh. I did not expect to remember so many things before starting to tell Elsa about the pocket watch. I look at the silver arrows. Exactly four minutes after I was going back to the chair, Elsa enters the room and connects her phone. She must be waiting for

someone to call her, as she is looking at the screen continuously.

“At which point in the story were we? Oh, true! The cutlery, he always wanted me and my cousins to help our grandmother with the cleaning every time we were having dinner at their home. In fact, I just remembered an anecdote about my grandfather, my cousins and me!

It happened in summer. We had a small country-house in Berwick-upon-Tweed, extremely close to the border of England and Scotland. It was there where my grandfather was raised, and he had lived there until he found a job at an iron factory in Manchester. He did not sell it when his parents died, and we used to stay there for our summer vacations. My friends went to Southern England, where the weather had always been nicer and there were way more things to do. However, I now miss being there with my cousins Frank and Thelma, so close to the sea in the middle of nowhere.

Now I would like to be back, but then I hated going there. My parents worked during summer so they used to send me to Berwick with my grandparents, which was the most boring thing someone could think of doing during holidays. I certainly had more fun at school than there, where the most interesting thing to do was walking to the beach, where the water was so freezing that having a bath was equivalent to having a cold for the next two weeks. As I have told you, I had to help my grandparents with work at home and also do the shopping every day. The only moment in the week when I could take a break was on Sundays; going to the church was unnegotiable.

The churchman in Berwick was the most boring man this world has ever seen. He made me hate my own religion during his sermon, which was an hour long, but it seemed like days. The worst thing is that he was a very good friend of my grandfather, so that was not the only weekly sermon I had to listen to, as he usually visited us to have a drink of my grandfather’s homemade whiskey. Then, they would speak for hours about how the world was during wartime and about how the youth was not what it used to be anymore. I am pretty sure that if the

ecclesiastic would have been the one in charge of spreading Christianity around the world, our religion would have disappeared.

The only thing that made my days in Berwick more enjoyable was the company of my cousins Frank and Thelma. Frank was my age and Thelma was two years younger. You would have loved to meet them, they were always very nice to me. They both were born in... Well, it does not matter. What is relevant is that they stayed there in July, my favourite month of the summer. With them, those eternal walks around the town became way more interesting and we could split the housework. We believed that there was a phantom in the castle. We liked going there and theorizing about where the phantom hid and why was he living in Berwick. We were not allowed to go there at night, and we thought that the phantom was the main reason for the prohibition.

One afternoon, we were playing hide and seek next to the river. There are two bridges that can be used to cross from one side of the river to the other, and we loved playing next to the older one, because there were many trees, rocks and good hiding places, and we could not be noticed by the adults in town. When the sun started to set, our grandfather would come and take us home, but that day we were having so much fun that we decided to add him to the game and hide from him. We hid under the first arch of the bridge, being very careful not to fall into the river. He started looking for us, but there was nobody there:

— Frank! Thelma! Alexander! Where are you? Your grandma is waiting for dinner, come on! If we don’t get there on time this will be the last time you play hide and seek this summer, I promise! Can you hear me?

He looked behind every tree, crossed the river at least three times, and when he removed a rock a butterfly appeared, and he jumped back.

— Augh! Damned butterfly, you will pay for this!

Thelma could not contain her laugh and he noticed it. He did not

have good eyesight but could hear perfectly.

— I give up! I'm going back home, damned kids...

Then he started walking slowly to the arch, trying not to be heard. When he was getting prepared to shout and scare us, he slipped and fell into the river, just in front of us, and he looked at his three grandchildren face-to-face. My heart stopped beating for five seconds. Nobody said a word and a freezing sensation invaded my veins. We three were petrified. "We are done," I thought.

Suddenly, a smile was drawn in our grandfather's face and he broke into laughter. We looked at each other and started laughing too. We did not expect that but neither did we expect the water to fall on us seconds later, thrown by our grandfather. Thelma also slipped and Frank and I jumped to join them in the water. I can perfectly remember my grandfather's face full of happiness, his few grey hairs stuck on his head and his wise eyes shining, while he tried to avoid the water we were dropping at him. When the sun faded, we walked back home, leaving wet footprints in our way. Grandfather wanted to do a roundabout not to be noticed by the neighbours, but we insisted and took the shortest path across the town square. Everyone looked at us like aliens, but our grandfather was with us and anything else did matter.

In fact, we did not think about the cold that we were going to have in the following two weeks until we joined our grandmother at home, exhausted, still being wet and laughing. She got very angry, but that did not ruin the great moment we were having. She brought us some towels and we had dinner together, as always.

If I could choose to go back to one moment in my life, I would go back to that afternoon in Berwick without hesitation. It was sad, Elsa, but that was the only happy moment I remember having lived with my grandfather, and probably it was not his fault, but mine. I was blinded during all my childhood, I believed that the world would stay as I knew

it forever, but nothing was as far from reality. I always saw him as a social outcast, who knew nothing about the world at the time and who lived in the past. I will never be as wise as him. "We need to be prepared for the bad times", he used to say. The bad times came for me with his death, and I was not prepared for them. I was not prepared to have children, I was not prepared to take care of my parents when my father lost his job. I was not prepared to lose them too, and I was not prepared for your grandmother's death. Every time I was blocked, I would have killed for being able to ask my grandfather for advice.

Since he left us, I have been thinking about how my life would have changed if I had listened to his stories during those stops on our way home. I have been wondering if my summers would have been nicer if I had spent more time with him and learnt to enjoy the relaxing life in Berwick. He was not perfect, but he was an honest man. You know what, Elsa? There is always something we can learn from each person, and the elders have learnt from hundreds of people during their lives.

Maybe I just feel guilty for not even saying "thank you" when he gave me this pocket watch for my birthday, but I have never forgiven that young Alexander. Or is it because I regret having preferred to stay with a couple of friends in Manchester during my grandfather's last two summers, those after my grandmother's death, instead of going with him to Berwick? I don't know. Nevertheless, I needed to tell someone about him, and you are the one who most can learn from it, Elsa. Trust me, I would love to tell you more stories of my grandfather, but this is all I know. If I had only listened...

Anyway, I have always carried this pocket watch with me, but I want you to have it. I cannot keep it with me forever. When I die, it will still go on working. I do not want it to be buried together with my body. The clock hands are made of silver but, every time you open it, it should remind you that time is gold. You should learn this before it is too late, or you will regret it. Try to make good use of it as long as you can, you

never know when the bad times will come. Take it Elsa, it is yours now.”

— Oh! What is it?... Grandpa?

— It’s your great-great grandfather’s pocket watch. Weren’t you listening to me?

— Oh, true! I appreciate it. What are those strange letters around the clock hands?

— They are Roman numerals. I can teach you how to read them.

— I think we’ve had enough Roman numerals for today, Dad. It’s time to leave, old fellow.

Says my son, who has just entered the room.

— I know, I know... Bye Elsa.

— Bye, Grandpa!

Then, she gives me a warm and lovely kiss on my cheek, which I try to enjoy as if it was the last one, as I learnt to do a long time ago. I follow my son to the door and, before crossing the door, I turn back and have a last look at Elsa. She looks at the watch with curiosity. Then, she closes it and puts it inside her pocket. She takes her phone and continues looking at the screen. What does that phone has that makes it so interesting? Is the phone call she is waiting for that important? I am just not able to understand how a girl of her age can have such an interesting call to wait for.

— Let’s go, Dad. Vicky must be waiting for you.

He opens the car door, helps me get in and sit on the left seat, circles the car and takes a seat on my right. I do not say anything during

the thirty minutes that it takes going from my son’s home to the nursing home. He speaks to me from time to time, but I am too dispersed to follow his banal conversation, so he stops trying.

We arrive at the parking of the nursing home and I see Vicky’s silhouette at the door, looking at her watch. My son leaves the car, helps me stand up, which is certainly harder than sitting down, and we walk together to the entrance, where he says goodbye and goes back to the car. I get in.

— Hello, Alex! Did you have fun with your family?

— Call me Alexander, please...

— Ok, Alexander! You must have had loads of fun; do you know what time is it?

My hand gets instinctively inside my jacket’s pocket and when it does not find anything I remember.

— To be honest, I don’t know... But I guess it’s time to go back to bed.

— You’re right, Alexander, I’ll help you there. Tell me, what did you have for dinner?

— Fish and chips.

I am lying. I do not remember. But I can perfectly taste the fish and chips I loved to eat in Berwick’s *Castlegate Fish & Chips*. I enter my room, have a last look at the family photo on my desk and I lay on the bed with my eyes closed. My cheek is still burning.

F-I-R-E

By Charmaine Wong Cheuk Lam

I have always loved writing but I have never had the determination to finish one. Either my characters are in between the moments of dying and dead, or the plot never goes on after a brilliant opening. Still, I believe story never has an ending. It is always related to the endless past and stretches towards an endless future, and so do our memories.

Jodie was half way through her four years of university life, and every day she had so much to reflect upon. Studying literature was both a privilege and a headache to her. “You know how literature could drive me crazy. We learn to close-read and now I ended up close-reading everything,” she told her friends. The other day she was watching ‘The Painted Veil’ before bed and soon she was analyzing the shots, the characters, the symbols, the theme ... There was a dissolve that overlaps two shots of peonies beautifully unfurling and fading at the same time, and she figured out it was a metaphorical image of the transience of mortal lives, and the steadfastness of wonders in lives. That night she laid on her bed sleepless, and all of a sudden she was in tears. Her memories gushed: she saw snapshots of her family, her friends, her boyfriend. She was curling up under the bed sheet and felt warm and protected. This must be how living as a baby inside the womb is like, she thought. Then all of a sudden, she was afraid of death. She was afraid of her mum’s death, her dad’s death, her own death and death of anyone who meant a lot to her. She curled herself up even tighter and now she was unaware that she was wrapping her arms around her own shoulders. She felt the need to hang on to something.

It was already three in the morning and still, she was sleepless. She started gazing around the room while still lying on bed. There was no access to moonlight in her bedroom so instead of seeing the actual objects laid around her bedroom, she saw different shades of black and grey and also the red lights from the extension cord under the desk. Yet, she saw the bedroom as if it was colored and alive. She remembered that purple paper rose she got on her 18th birthday. It was the very first

flower he made for a girl, and it was the very first flower she received from a boy, and during that night, she remembered both of their hands touching, and their heart beating, echoing in that sudden silence. Then there were the grey rectangles that filled the wall behind the desk, the polaroid taken with all her loved ones. She saw herself crawling around the house in that pink blue diaper with those chubby palms and feet, and she heard her own baby chuckle, and playing around the tongue and lips, trying to get the open vowels right. She remembered those times when she was still learning to walk: her dad always followed her around the house with a video recorder and she would peek inside the lens, and mum was constantly in and out the screen because as long as her daughter was awake, she could never settle down, she had always been feeding, washing, cooking and tidying. Suddenly she felt that pride to be a part of this family, the pride that was rich and dense and made her feel her own existence.

Then through that wooden cupboard beside the desk, she breathed deeply the scent of handwritten letters from a teacher and friends and she could feel the tears again as if she was reading them during the day of graduation ceremony. She remembered the yellow smell of the wooden chairs and desks in needlework room at school where she started to find her own sense of achievement. She heard her own out-of-tune humming along the corridor which her friends wouldn’t mind and ended up jamming a harmony that they thought it sounded good. Of course, she wouldn’t forget the words scribbled on the letters for him, through which they both learnt to apologize and grew together. For the first time, she realized herself actually being a part of her room, a room that smelled like a dark chocolate cream puff which was made of pastry of the past and created a scent that lingers along time. It was a room full of flavours where everything had a place in her heart.

The next morning, like a routine daily live, she got changed, had her backpack on and left home. The public estate area where Jodie lived was built along a slope and her building was a thirty-flats wide and fifteen-floors high rectangular block, with residential flats starting from

the third floor, facing a park. And between the park and the estate, there was a main road which was levelled up from the slope like a bridge that had the same level as the third floor where Jodie lived, with two short footbridges linking the main road and either ends of the building respectively. Every morning, Jodie crossed either one of the footbridge and walked to the bus stop that was located on the road in-between both footbridges, which was right in front of her flat where Jodie could see her kitchen and her parent's bedroom clearly.

Ten minutes had passed but still no bus had arrived yet. The road was always the busiest especially at seven thirty in the morning: the boys leaning on the window and waving at their parents as the school bus engine starts, the routine Rehabus loading and unloading the elderly in wheelchairs, and a bunch of middle-aged women strolling along the road with red and white plastics bags of meat and vegetables. Jodie had been part of all these for twenty years and she was grateful. Living in a public estate was average but Jodie was certain that her life was beyond average. She was always reminiscing the past like an old grannie. People always said she was nostalgic, but she could not help it. It was all the old memories, both good and bad, that made her feel special.

As she was staring fondly at the birds chirping on the tree branches in the park, her mind was suddenly disturbed by a fire alarm. She turned her back and started. Smoke was wafting around a kitchen, and it was her kitchen. The next second, she saw familiar faces covering their mouths – her neighbours – rushing out from their flats, through the footbridge and onto the road. Soon there was a crowd of on-lookers around the park and along the road.

“Oh Jodie,” Mrs. Lai, a 50 year old lady who lived next to Jodie, cried as she spotted Jodie at the bus stop, “your house is on fire”.

The fire started a few minutes after Jodie left home. It began with a smoke from the faulty wire in the electrical cord under the desk that connected every electrical appliance in the bedroom. When the cord was overheated, it started burning with flames, which they then

slithered along the wires and across the floor and ignited everything it touches: the blanket, the carpet, the wall, and the foot of the chair and desk. Soon the legs of the desk cracked and the photo frames, the music box and the carousel woodcrafts tumbled down, drowning in the sea of flame. The flicker on the wall was licking and scrunching up the edges of the polaroid, which then became a luminous beast that is refused to be tamed, crawling and swallowing up the wallpaper and engulfing the cupboard – a coffin that kept dead letters, waiting to be cremated in the boiling rage. Thick, dense, choking smoke surged towards the ceiling, devoured the bedroom, and swarmed into the living, the kitchen and her parent's bedroom.

After she called her mum and dad, she stood at the bus stop watching, watching alone, with her backpack dangling on one shoulder. Jodie was staring blankly as the smoke rose from the kitchen and towards the clear blue sky, as if there was a black veil covering her head, mourning in a funeral. The neighbours were also standing with Jodie, trying to search for words to comfort her but there was none. Intermittently, some of them would turn their heads and gave her a look of reassurance but Jodie was unaware of them. Few minutes after the fire alarm rang, the firemen and policemen arrived. The road was silent as everyone was watching the firemen spraying water into the flat. Then without Jodie realizing it, her left fingers were peeling off the skin of the right thumb. Until she peeled off too much skin and felt some blood, she started to peel off bit of the fingernails. The smoke was slowly disappearing.

“Jodie!” Jodie's mum was already yelling once she got off the taxi, dashing.

“Oh dear, dear, are you hurt?” She was touching her cheek and she felt a slight shiver around the jaw. She looked at Jodie, and she knew her daughter's expression was one that she has never seen in her life as a mother. It was not nervousness. It was not fright.

“Oh dear, your fingers are bleeding, did you cut yourself?” Jodie shook her head. At the meantime, dad arrived and joined them.

“Jodie, it’s okay, mum and dad are here,” Dad stroked her hair and patted her shoulders. He held her wife’s hand and looked into her eyes and then they stared together at the burnt kitchen and the bedroom. This was their first home after marriage. Through the broken windows, they saw their days passing by all these years. This was the place where they built a home. Now, it was merely ashes and ruins. He felt the heaviness on his broad shoulders.

After an hour, they were told the fire was put out and they could return to their flat. The firemen reported that except the kitchen and the bedroom near the road. Everything was mostly burnt. As they arrived with masks and gloves on, they were all started. During the time waiting on the road they had pictured what to expect, but seeing an actual burnt flat right in front of them was a completely different thing. They could still smell the remains of smoke and felt some heat. As her mum and dad were checking the kitchen and the living room, Jodie went straight into her bedroom.

Her room was then in actual shades of black and grey. It was no longer the room that she had been living for twenty years but merely a hollow space with four grey walls that looked like the stones in a graveyard. Some remains of the white wall paper dangled from the ceiling. The only few things she saw was the outline of the cupboard and the bed, but other than that, she could not really tell what they were – either they were in piles of ashes and broken pieces or soaked up by water. Everything worthy was gone: the decorations on the desk were gone; the polaroid on the wall was gone; the letters and cassettes of her childhood videos and USBs of numerous photos in the cupboard were gone; and the photo albums – a collection of snapshots of Jodie’s childhood, her parent’s wedding photos and their childhoods – that were kept under her bed, were gone. She forced herself to dig out everything she could remember about the days recorded behind the photos, but

she could not. The only thing she had in mind was that she had lost everything that was important to her. All of a sudden, she heard the echo of her sobbing, like an innocent spirit moaning in the inferno.

“It’s okay darling. Don’t cry,” Jodie’s mum went into the room and hugged her.

“No, its not,” her voiced wavered as she spoke, “I cannot remember a thing from the past, those important ones, like... like I was having Alzheimer, and yours and dad’s photos, the wedding photos, were all gone as well”.

For a few seconds, she hesitated to speak because she forgot those albums were placed under Jodie’s bed, but not in her own bedroom. But she quickly gathered her thoughts.

“Jodie, did you recall me and dad digging the wedding album out under your bed?”

Jodie shook her head.

“Exactly. Important things do not fade in memory,” she patted Jodie’s head, “and you can feel it here.” She pointed at her chest. “I still recall every emotion I had during the wedding, the days I lived with your grandparents, your very first cry after birth, and also your grandpa’s disfigurement in the mortuary. The joy and pain are still here.”

Jodie was still sobbing and didn’t reply but she was listening, with her head resting on mum’s chest.

“You remember four years ago you returned from a five-day Outward Bound camping? The first thing you did was not taking a shower. You took a notebook out and kept scribbling. I asked you what you were doing and you said because phones were not allowed during

the camp so you were trying to keep as many memories as possible before you would forget them. But have you flipped it open again since then?"

Jodie shook her head. But she remembered. She remembered the fear when she was kayaking alone and the waves kept pushing her away from the shore. She remembered the nights sleeping in a tent on the shore and hearing the water swishing on and off the sand like a blanket. She remembered the numbness in legs when she abseiled down the cliff for the first time. Choking back her tears, she started nodding. She understood.

"Sometimes, you have to be impressed by how much a brain can store." Jodie's mum patted her shoulders and smiled. "Oh, and come out to help us check if anything can be kept in our bedroom later." Then she left Jodie alone.

Jodie bent down, grabbed a handful of ashes and held them in her palm. She was imagining what they were before. Then slowly, the ashes started to fall swiftly between the gloved fingers. She felt the fragility and lightness of memory's replica.

Fallen

By Sabrina Lam Jing

"This story is written in remembrance of a close friend of mine who passed away a few years ago."

Again. Lucy's parents were fighting again.

Lucy had just put on her uniform. She sat on her bed. She looked at her watch. 7am. She was going to be late for school, but they were still arguing. She sighed and laid back on her bed. She looked at the ceiling. Her eyes were watery, her nose reddened. She closed her eyes. She imagined she was a bird, able to fly to other places, able to fly high enough to stop hearing noises.

Lucy opened her eyes. She glanced at her watch. 10am. Her parents had already gone to work. The house was quiet. No wonder I had fallen asleep, she thought. She straightened her wrinkled uniform. Put on her shoes. Left home.

By the time Lucy had arrived at school, it was already past recess. She handed her late slip to her teacher. Ignored her teacher's caring pat on her shoulder. Went back to her seat. Other students didn't seem surprised about her rudeness. She had been like this for weeks. Lucy didn't pay a single bit of attention in class. She only constantly looked at her gray watch, as if the watch was the most interesting thing in the world.

The lunch bell rang. Some students rushed out of the classroom to find seats in the canteen, while some walked in a relaxing manner, probably going out to the mall for lunch. Lucy left her seat and headed to the playground. She heard her friends calling her when she was still on the staircase. She grinned at them and hurried to the table under the tree. Her friends always saved her the seat nearest to the tree trunk, because it was less sunny there. As Lucy sat down she took out several lunch boxes and put them on the table. Lucy was a good cook and all

her friends loved her cooking. She brought lunch boxes that she made the previous night, filled with her friends' favorite food. Almost every day she would prepare her best friends their favorite foods. Cecily loved pork and desserts; Claudia loved broccoli and mushrooms; Judy loved Japanese cuisine; Vanessa loved spicy food. Today Lucy brought spicy Japanese curry, stir-fried broccoli with garlic, and sweet and sour pork. As always, her friends were waiting eagerly for her to open the lunch boxes. The moment Lucy opened them, her friends all cheered and dug in with excitement. Lucy smiled widely and chuckled, laughing at their silliness. Seeing them snatching food from the lunch boxes and from each other made her content, content because she made her friends happy. At least she was important to them. Her friends' exaggerated expression of gossips and smiles were precious. She had their faces and memories in her heart. She dared not to forget them.

The bell rang again. Lunch time was over. Lucy's friends complained about how short lunch time was. They pouted, unwilling to go to class. It happened every day. But Lucy loved it. They never hid their feelings in front of her. They were true to themselves. She trusted them and they trusted her back entirely. Friends. Such lovely people.

Afternoon classes were dreadful. She looked at her watch numerous times. Finally school was over. Lucy slowly walked to the mall. She walked in and out of different shops, round after round, until it was almost time for dinner. Lucy was heading to the train station when she heard someone call her. Vanessa was in her own clothes. Her parents, who were still in their business attire, stood behind their daughter and smiled kindly at Lucy. Vanessa's parents were too busy to cook tonight, so their family came out for dinner. They were going to celebrate Vanessa's birthday one week in advance, as her parents will be leaving for a business trip the next day for a month. Vanessa was very excited that she could finally try Sichuan-style hot pot, as her parents usually didn't let her eat spicy food due to her weak stomach.

“Good for you! Enjoy your family dinner.”

Lucy bought some groceries from the market and went home. Lucy's parents worked late, and she would always cook for them. Lucy was sweating in the kitchen, humming “Humpty Dumpty”. For some reason she loved nursery rhymes although she had already been a teenager. Tonight she braised pork shanks, hand-made some dumplings with pork and prawn fillings, and steamed an eel with black bean garlic sauce. She put the dishes on the dining table, filled three bowls of rice, still humming the tune. Her parents should be home by now. Slightly disappointed, she checked her phone for messages. Not to her surprise, they're not coming back for dinner, again. She hadn't dined even once with her parents for a month. Her parents didn't have to cook for her, and they didn't even have to go on business trips. Her smile faded. Her appetite lost. She should've known. She put the food in the fridge, all uneaten. She didn't bother to do her homework. Instead she went to the balcony. It was cold. Lucy only wore a T-shirt and shorts. The breeze brushed past her face. She didn't seem to mind. She looked at her watch again. This time she couldn't see the time. All she saw was darkness.

Lucy was absent the next day. Homeroom teachers did not appear in their homerooms on time. Students felt lucky that they had more free time. They chatted and played for half an hour. Then they stopped talking. The whole school was in eerie silence. Students looked at each other. No one dared to make a sound. The teachers came an hour later, and the silence was then broken.

The silence was broken with sobs, then hysterical crying. Lucy's friends felt suffocated. Tears rolled down their cheeks. Teachers held them in their arms, patting to comfort them. It was no use. Lucy wasn't, would not be there.

Teachers discussed Lucy's recent behavior at school with her parents.

Lucy's parents said she didn't show signs of unhappiness at home. They said she was always cheerful.

Lucy's friends asked Lucy's parents why she died.

Lucy's parents said Lucy fell to her death when she tried to reach for her beloved watch that she'd dropped. It was the last present she'd received from her parents.

Lucy loved that watch. She never took it off.

Never.



Better World: Stories of the imaginary

“So this is it?”

“To be frank, I hate this place. This place stinks.”



Prison

By Linus Lee Hoi Ching

Hey there! I'm Linus, an English Major and a huge fan of fantasy. The inspiration for this story was mainly drawn from the Fate series, a Japanese fantasy game franchise that involves the summoning of famous historical and mythical figures. This is my first time writing a fantasy that involves historical references—hope you enjoy reading it!

After wiping the sweat off my face, I tick the box next to “locks”—the last item on the checklist.

It's been a week since I got assigned as a warden here. Still not used to the temperature here—it's just way too hot. To be frank, I hate this place. This place stinks. It is even worse than what people described! I mean, I've been thrown in jail, too, but I've never served a sentence in a prison so bad that I feel sick merely staying here. And this is only the ground floor—I heard that the lower it gets, the worse things get. Guess I'm lucky to be sentenced with community service order instead of a prison sentence. Well, not so lucky being assigned here. Just what in the world did the prisoners here do to deserve such a harsh punishment?

I take a deep sigh as I look at the burning red sky through the barred windows of a cell.

“Oi! Why you stand around! Go work!” shouted the senior warden—my boss—from far away. “Under no circumstances are you allowed to stand around in the containment wing! You understood?”

“Yes sir,” I replied—unwillingly. What is left to do? All the prisoners are locked up, and I just checked the locks on each and every one of the cells—there is literally NOTHING left to do on the list! What am I supposed to do? Walk around like the old fool you are and pretend to be working hard? Hell no. I don't want to be considered someone like you. At least I don't mix up “circumcisions” with “circumstances”.

Though I do remember being told more than once not to stand around, that we wardens have to keep moving and find things to occupy ourselves. Why though? It's not work ethics or etiquette (as if people here have that sort of stuff). The old man told me the other day. What was it? Can't recall.

Seriously though, what else can I do? I've done everything I have to.

But there's something I've wanted to do since I got here. One thing. That is, to pay the Tenth Level—Special Containment a visit.

This place is well-known for its harsh living environments (and I'm experiencing it first-hand). Since I was young I learnt that this place had many cells on many underground floors, where prisoners were held on different floors according to their crimes. But it was only said that there were nine levels. I never knew there was a tenth until I came here (well, I didn't even know working as a warden here was an option for people like me). Rumour has it that this is nowhere near the terrible environments of the Special Containment, where the worst damned villains are held.

I squeeze my eyes and take a peek at the old man's office.

Good, he's asleep in his office. I sneak in, and take his warden ID as well as the master key card hanging on the rack. Damn, it's easy.

I look around before entering the elevator, making sure that no one sees me going down, as we initiate wardens don't have the level of security clearance to access such areas. In fact, the elevator would normally be locked, and even if it isn't, it wouldn't let me go to floors lower than B1. But now that I have the master key card, I can undo any lock and bypass any security measure.

As the elevator goes downwards, it gets increasingly hot. And

stinkier. It's so bad, that I actually thought about giving up and getting back up there. But no, I can't just give up like this, so instead I cover my nose with my hands and proceed.

The elevator door opens, and the first thing that comes to me is the stench. It's nothing like the upper floors. Up there, it's just odour. But here there's something else to it.

Right outside the elevator is a long corridor. The environment doesn't seem any much different than the upper floors, except for the lights. The lights up there were white, but here it's red. Guess that's an imitation of how it's like outside. Also, there's a big timer down the corridor, counting down. There are 17 minutes left on the timer.

I walk along the corridor, and the first thing I notice is that the hygiene down here is poor. There are black stains on the floor—guess the wardens down here spilled something and didn't care to clean up. But still, they sure spilled a lot—and everywhere. Is that where the stench came from? Eww.

Soon I begin to see prison cells, one next to the other on the right side of the corridor with the same timer opposite each cell. I take a look into the cell, but I can't see anything—the cell is so dark, I can't even see the faces of the prisoners in there. I take a closer look at the plate next to the cell.

Cell SC-024.

I lean on the concrete wall next to SC-024 and open the prison database on my tablet.

Hmm let's see... Special Containment... Cell SC-024... Ah, there it is. Cell SC-024, shared by four prisoners. Prisoner designates "IO" "GdR" "AW" and "JtR".

Well that's interesting. In the upper levels prisoner designates are

all number-based, but down here... Well if anything, these guys here are all VIPs. Let me just see if I can find the records in the database.

I type "IO" in the database search, and a bunch of results popped up on the screen, though none of them seem to match what I'm looking for—only names like Malario and Dio—and I'm pretty sure prisoner designates aren't based on the last characters of their names. They really should upgrade their systems—at least add a filter function to filter out results that don't contain IO as an individual term.

5 minutes passed, and still nothing on IO.

I let out a heavy sigh. Guess I'll have to move o—

"Looking for something?"

Surprised and scared by the sudden voice, I jumped and a shiver went down my spine when the voice reached out. Looking towards where the voice came from, I see a man smiling at me. An Asian man, with a slight Japanese accent in his tongue. Young. In his late twenties I think. He has a collar on his neck.

"Oh sorry, I didn't mean to scare you. I saw you searching my prisoner designate."

"None of your concern, prisoner. Go back inside and sleep, you got work to do tomorrow," I ordered him in a deep voice.

"Work, eh? You needa work on your intimidation skills, kid. Keeping your voice deep ain't gonna make you scary. It makes you look stupid."

"Inside! Now--" I couldn't finish as IO reached out and covered my mouth.

“Sh sh sh shh shh... quiet now... you don’t want to wake my cellmates up,” whispers IO in a deep, chill-inspiring voice.

I’m scared and can’t move. No one’s ever done this to me, not to mention that these hands belong to a Very important Prisoner.

“Ughhh... who’s shouting in the middle of the night?” murmurs another voice in the cell.

“It’s nothing, go back to sleep, Jack.” says IO as he lifts his hand off my face.

“Listen, kid. I know what you’re here for. You’re not the first kid to come down here to Special Containment to ‘broaden their horizons’. The truth is, there’s nothing too special about here compared to what you got up there. Maybe perhaps a little more suffering down here. But that’s all to it. And before you get into further trouble, I’d suggest you take your leave,” says IO in a calming voice.

I know I should take his advice. But curiosity gets the better of me. I’m not leaving empty-handed.

“Before I leave, I’ll have you answer a few questions.”

“Well it’s your call, but you might wanna come in first.”

“What? No way.”

“You see that timer over there? 30 seconds left until next patrol,” says Izo as he pointed to the timer opposite the cell that shows 10:30, “The patrol comes in every 10 minutes. You probably don’t wanna get caught by one of your fellow colleagues, huh?”

“As if. You’re just trying to get me to open the gate. I know your tricks.”

“Suit yourself.”

“Hmph. Wh-“

I was about to start asking, but the thought was interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps down the corridor. The sound of boots—the kind I’m wearing.

“Wanna change your mind?” asked IO with a I-told-you-so face.

It definitely is a bad idea, but at least it’s better than getting caught coming down here.

“Back off. If you try anything, I’ll scream for help.”

“As if you will risk letting your colleagues know. But nah, I won’t.”

Swiftly, I swipe the master key card at the lock and tap the old man’s ID on the sensor. The gate unlocks and I slip into the cell, where IO and I both retreat into the shaded part of the cell. I never let my guard down, of course, knowing that I’m dangerously close to a bunch of unredeemable sinners. I watch as the warden of this floor pass by the cell. He dresses quite differently from me. The boots are the same, but apart from that it’s all heavy armor. What’s even more unsettling is that he was holding a shield, despite the heavy security measures down here. Seconds later, he turns back and heads down the corridor. After making sure he’s gone, I decided to break the silence.

“Just who the heck are you?” I asked.

“Isn’t that obvious? Not many Japanese men of my age down here. Most of them go to the upper floors.”

“What have you done to get locked down here? Must have been

something extremely bad to get thrown into Special Containment in here.”

“What? Kid, you’re probably the dumbest one who’s ever come down here. The name’s Izo. Izo Okada. That’s what ‘IO’ stands for. Thought you’d have that figured out by now.”

“Wait, Izo Okada? The Hitokiri Izo? The Bakufu Assassin?”

“Yes.”

Another shiver went down my spine. An assassin, a killer right in front of me. In arm’s reach. And he had lots of opportunities to kill me in the past 2 minutes.

“Understand now? All people down here are famous scum like me. Or I should say, infamous. Most of us got blood on our hands.”

“Not me, Mr Izo.” Says a female voice at my back.

“*Chikusho*,” Izo whispers. “So you’re awake.”

“Yes, Mr Okada. And mind you, that not everyone here is like you!” replies the voice. I turn around, and see a Caucasian woman. Blonde. Young. Perhaps not even an adult. She also has that collar on the neck like Izo. She reaches out and holds one of my hands in hers, and cries, “sir, please don’t judge me based on what Mr Izo said! I’m innocent! Wrongly imprisoned here for life! Please, help me!”

Honestly, I’ve never been as confused as I am right now. First of all, why is there a girl in a man’s cell? And what does she mean by being wronged? Her pleas sound genuine. I mean, I can’t see how a girl like this doing something that deserves a sentence down here.

“Bullshit,” says Izo. “Can’t believe you almost fell for that. Don’t

give her any sympathy. You know that no one ever gets thrown down here ‘wrongly’. The judgement never wrongs anyone. Although she’s right. She’s got no blood on her hands. Not on hers, anyway.”

Realizing something is wrong, I pulled my hand from her clasp.

“Tch, you’re no fun, Mr Okada,” says as the woman pulled a face at Izo before looking at me again.

“I’m Abigail. What’s your name?” She asks, smiling.

“Jo—“

“Don’t answer that,” interrupts Izo.

“Mr Okada, you’re ruining all the fun! ARGH!” Shouted the angry Abigail as she went back to her bed.

“That’s how she did it back then. Accusing people of witchcraft while putting up disgusting acts of innocence to hide the devil within. Also what she did to the kids before you,” Izo continues.

Wait, witchcraft? Abigail?

“Look, you really should go now. Down here, nasty things have happened to young, ‘adventurous’ wardens like you. And adventurous is only a better word for ‘*Baka*’. Now go. And in case you’re going to ask, I don’t know why she’s assigned to a men’s cell. No difference between sinners I guess.”

“What do you mean, ‘nasty’? It’s not like you get wardens coming into prisoners’ cells every day.”

“You see that countdown timer?” asked Izo as he pointed at the timer opposite the cell.

“Yeah?”

“That’s the countdown to what we call the ‘Recess’. Or recreation.”

“So? We have recreation in the upper floors too.”

“The thing is, your recreation is for inmates to take a stretch, recreation here is...quite unusual.”

I don’t like the sound of this.

“Once that timer is up, all cells will be unlocked, and all prisoners on this floor will be allowed to leave their cells and ‘interact’ with one another. The violent way,” Izo continues.

“Wait, so you’re saying you get to wrestle one another? How’s that possible? Wouldn’t the wardens and guards stop you?”

“That’s the point—they don’t. They won’t.”

I don’t get it. Why? It’s our jobs as wardens to keep order here right? Even if the wardens themselves were once sinners.

“That’s part of our punishment. You ever heard the story about the long spoon in heaven and hell?”

I shake my head.

“You see, the Holy One made the poor joke of having only spoons for eating, both here and up there. Yet the spoons are so damn long, they can’t be used to eat unless you got arms longer than this goddamn corridor. Yet the ones in heaven, the damn angels? They fed one another with those spoons, and shared a happy life, blah blah blah. On the other hand, the ones down here? They only cared to feed themselves. Of

course, it didn’t work. So they decided it’s better they kill one another with those spoons. Better to feed their bloodlust than their appetite, I suppose,” says Izo with a laugh, “but that’s the point—we were meant to kill one another with those spoons. Hell, they even give us back our weapons in that one hour of Recess time. That’s the ultimate punishment we could get, I suppose—dying here, being killed by people of the same kind.”

“You’re joking, right?” I find it hard to believe what he says.

“You want proof? Take a deep sniff. It stinks, right? Take a look out there. See those stains on the ground? That’s where the stench came from. That’s blood. Blood shed from the poor prisoners who couldn’t survive Recess. I wish I didn’t have to keep on doing what I used to do. No choice, though. You wanna live, you gotta kill. And once time is up, this damn thing on our necks? It shocks us and knocks us out, only for them to throw us back in here.”

Disgusting. I never thought there was a side so dark to this prison. Forcing prisoners to keep repeating their sins? That’s just cruel. They could never be redeemed this way.

“But you don’t HAVE to kill one another, right?”

“Nope, but it’s in the nature of us sinners. Just like you. You were assigned here as a warden on service order as a way of paying for your crimes, right? Yet here you are, going to places you shouldn’t be in. Places you don’t have to be in.”

“Well in the same sense, you have a choice! People like you, you can choose to persuade others to stop the pointless violence! That’s the only way to redemption!”

“Hmph. You’re funny, kid. Redemption? Me? I never really thought about it. Though it does sound a bit tempting,” says Izo with a

smile.

Suddenly, Abigail began weeping next to another prisoner's bed.

"*Kuso*, here we go again..." Izo turns away with a facepalm.

"Abigail?" I look towards where the weeping came.

Suddenly a middle-aged man with a mustache and long hair ran into me, grabbed me and threw me against the wall, and shouted,

"WHO DARES WRONG MY SWEET JOAN? IS IT THEE?"

I'm both shocked and confused. Who the hell is Joan?

"BY THE NAME OF GOD, I CONDEMN THEE!"

He grabbed my neck—I couldn't breathe, and he was so strong I couldn't break free.

"For the love of god, shut up Baron." says Izo as he pulled the man from me.

I fall to my knees, and cough from the choking.

"ART THOU WITH THIS GARÇON? MAY GOD CONDEMN THEE AS WELL!" shouted the mad man as he resisted, "ESPECE DE MERDE, LET ME G—"

His shout was interrupted as Izo punched him in the face, saying,

"That's not even Joan in there. That's Abigail. Stop acting like a lunatic. (Not that you ain't one, but)... Well, just go back to console your 'Joan'."

He just said that's not Joan, but then he told him to console Joan...

Strangely though, the 'Baron' stopped, went back and curled up on his bed. I could faintly hear him whispering and sobbing about Abigail? Joan? I don't know anymore.

"Don't mind the Baron, something's off in his head. He's always like this. That's what happens when someone like him doesn't get children to, well, 'dissect'. Or was it the reverse? Don't know, don't care. Oh and in case you're wondering, the designate for the Baron is GdR. That rings a bell? But you see now, these are the people kept down here. And that's a pretty big reason to get the hell out of here now. If that doesn't persuade you, the prisoners in the next cell are EB and V3. They're vampires out for blood, and you won't want to see them in action. Even I dare not cross them," Izo explains as he helps me up.

I look at the timer—2 minutes and 3 seconds left on the clock. At the same time, I hear chattering in other cells—more and more prisoners waking up and talking to their cellmates. Right on time. What Izo said is true.

"So, made up your mind yet? I'd have hightailed it out of here if I were you, especially considering how the elevator will be locked during Recess. You know, to make sure we don't go anywhere. So now's your only chance," suggests Izo, leaning on the wall next to the bars.

And he's right. To be frank, I'm not feeling as adventurous as I was when I first came down. Not after learning the truth behind this place. I feel disgusted, especially after all these sinners have touched me and screamed at me. I shouldn't be down here with them. Just being here makes me sick. Sick of the stench of sin. I mean, the only person who's been truly nice to me here is Izo. He saved me. He's the only one free of malice here. And for that, I should trust him and take his advice. I exit the cell and locked the gate with the master key card.

"Well, goodbye and good luck with Recess, Izo. Hope you find

redemption in the end. And thanks for not taking advantage of me.” I said, reaching into the bars for a handshake. A formal farewell.

“Heh. *Sayonara*,” replied Izo as we shake hands. He then turns away with a smile.

I hurry down the hallway and into the elevator. The elevator door has barely closed when the bell rang—it’s time for “Recess”. As the elevator goes up, I can faintly hear Izo shouting. Is he trying to persuade the prisoners? Sounds of metal clashing together followed, along with screams of pain and death. I dare not imagine how things look like. I hope Izo gets through well. He deserves better than this.

Now I remember. Why the old man told us not to stand around—it was because we don’t want to be influenced by prisoners. I remember him telling me this here, in the elevator, on my first day here when he gave me a brief tour of the top 3 floors where I work. Prisoners would begin talking, and we could be affected, perhaps even changed, by the words of different sinners kept in here. We were assigned as wardens as an opportunity for redemption, not to get deeper into sin.

After I got back to the upper floors, I return the senior warden’s ID before he wakes up, and apologizes to him for being disrespectful to him before, though he doesn’t seem to have minded it. But from now on, I won’t disobey any more orders. I don’t want to go any deeper into this prison of sin anymore.

I will remember my experience in Special Containment, the people whom I met down there, and I will strive not to become the people like them. I will redeem myself, and one day leave this prison.

--15 minutes later, in Special Containment--

“Well, they’re all gone.” I said, pulling my katana from the

corpse on the ground. Damn, this armor is thick.

“Ugh, finally. I hate Recess. I hate having to stick with this old man in this cell to avoid getting in the crossfire. Do you have any idea how it feels like to be with someone this crazy? Ugh!” exclaims Abigail as she stands up and walks away from the Baron.

“J-Joan?” The Baron crawls towards Abigail, calling the name of his obsession. Poor fellow.

“Go away, old man, your Joan’s dead for a long time. Burned at the stake, remember? That’s when you went all lonely?”

“Oh no... Joan... my sweet, sweet Joan...” cried the Baron as he laid down on his bed, weeping.

Abigail, on the other hand, began laughing. Damned devil.

“Izo, are you sure you have it? You better be, or I will have your head and blood like I did to my people back then,” warns V3.

“Yeah, you better be sure, or you’re dead. I normally only choose girls, but I don’t mind making an exception for you,” says EB.

“Please, my lord and Countess, calm down. Here it is,” I said, throwing it to V3.

“But how? You would have expected him to take extra care in protecting this,” asks V3, surprised as he inspects and confirms its authenticity.

“Well, stealing’s easy, once you’ve spent enough time in places like Whitechapel.” Answers Jack.

“Nicely done,” I said, giving Jack a thumbs up.

“You know, it’s not the stealing that impresses me, but the hiding. You never fail to surprise me how well you conceal yourself, even in the open. All those surgical procedures, done right on the streets, and you never get caught.” I continue.

“The same thing you did with your bloodlust when the boy was still in the cell. Impressive. Except when you held him in the face. Your bloodlust was out for a moment there—I almost got worried that he might have gotten on guard again. We’re lucky that he’s an idiot.” Jack replies.

“Yeah, that was a mistake. I’ve gotten rusty. Plus, it was just too exciting. It’s been a long time since I held someone’s flesh in hand. Reminds me of the good old days, when I held people on the ground with one hand and swiped my sword down with the other.” I said as the Countess gives it back to me after another round of inspection.

“Well those days won’t be any old soon enough.” says Abigail with a smirk.

“Right you are, *Ojou-chan*. Heh heh, hahaha...” I can no longer contain my laughter.

Everyone begins laughing. The Baron sits up and looks at us.

“Well, don’t just sit there, brethren! Come on! Let’s have some fun. Joan will be proud! Besides, I’m sure there are plenty of young children out there! You can take the boys like you used to; I’ll take the girls!” exclaims EB.

“Oh, OH PLEASE! PLEASE TAKE ME WITH YOU!” says the Baron, whose eyes lit up with excitement.

“Heh, welcome to the party! Now, let’s tear shit up! *Ikuzo!*” I shouted to all the bloodthirsty prisoners in Special Containment, holding my sword up high with one hand, and the master key card in another.

Unicorn

By Bubbles Cheung Yee Ching

Just someone who loves to read and write...and create! Hoping that one day I can create a story with rounded characters and an impactful message. Although I studied English as my major, for some reasons, my results for Philosophy classes are way higher. I wonder why.

When I was young, a tiny horn appeared on my head. Right in the middle of my forehead, a cone-shaped horn grew from my skull and squeezed out through my thin skin. A tiny white horn, as delicate as a spiral seashell washed to the shore.

I did not really understand why my parents got freaked out over my horn. All the others at school thought I was a descendant of a unicorn, that I inherited magical powers. The fun thing was that the little horn could emit light, bright enough to expel darkness. We always play shadow puppets in the classroom, until the teacher found out and switched on the lights. We made jokes about if I could really use magic, a teacher would be the first one I would play tricks on. And when we were out for school trips, our young class teacher even used me as the ‘landmark’. When we needed to gather, she would just shout, ‘Everyone go to the unicorn!’

I was having a blast.

Other than being a flashlight, the horn did not really do much. Of course, the horn was not really anything magical or impressive according to the doctor. It is just a case of sudden mutation due to puberty, some abnormal growth of a part of the bone, with some sort of bioluminescence stored inside. The doctor emphasized that he had already cured someone else like me. But, he said only about 3% of teenagers were diagnosed with this case, so we ought to treat it carefully.

I was not happy with the doctor, because he made my parents think that I was ill.

I wasn't ill. I was unique. And they hated it.

On one normal school day, Mother picked me up from school when I waved my friends goodbye. She wrinkled her forehead when she saw me. I had a tight schedule, and Mother wanted me to minimize traffic time, so she always drove me from school to tutorial classes directly.

"Honey, here, put this hat on." Mother said while driving. Her hand reached to the back seat and tossed me a cute pink hat with a hole in the middle.

"I don't think I need a hat Mom."

"Just put it on okay?"

"Why?"

"Just do it, dear."

"But I don't need it, we don't have to go outdoors for Math class." I tried to explain.

"It's not for shading from the sun, dear... the horn. Would you just cover it up and pretend that it is a decoration of the cap?"

"Why do I need to pretend that my horn is a decoration? It is a part of me."

"Because it is unusual! Okay? Normal kids don't have a freaking horn on their forehead! Haven't you noticed that?"

"But being unusual isn't a big deal, Mom."

"It is a big deal!" Mother's voice stuck in her throat and then she gushed out another sentence, "We can't bear unusualness. Just listen to me girl. I know more than you do."

"Everyone is unusual in some way! And we should embrace it instead of suppressing or hiding it." I didn't understand why Mother always denied me. "Our society flourishes because of how diverse we are."

"Just listen to me. I know better!" Mother sighed, "Let's just stop talking about this okay?"

"So this is it? You are not letting me talk because I am right, and you are wrong! And you know it! Your final rebuttal is to mute my voice?"

"How dare you talk to me like this!"

"Because this isn't about me not doing homework or failing exams. It is about how we view the world! And I don't think your way is better than mine!"

Mother's eyes were wide open. Her face was red out of irritation and anger. She took a deep breath. I thought she was about to explode and paint the same red on me.

"You little," she muttered, "I don't care what we were arguing! In any circumstances you shouldn't talk to your Mother like that! Pay me respect!"

She finally exploded, and then the air froze and the only sound in this packed space was the car engine and my rising heartbeat.

"Enough!" I yelled so loud because I thought it was the only way to defeat her. But my voice was not the only thing showing my

indignation - my horn glowed uncontrollably.

A strong beam of light burst out from the tip top of the spiral cone, filled the car with a dazzling light. The car was glowing for a minute.

“Ah!” Mother got scared and stepped on the brake. The momentum drove both of our bodies forward, and then the seatbelt dragged us back.

We were both panting in fear.

“Mom I’m...I’m sorry...”

“Shut up. Just shut up.”

“...I...”

Then, I was grounded for three weeks for this. I felt uncomfortable, a mixed feeling in my chest, like a mixture of chowder and clam soup, which did not taste good. I thought I had done wrong, but on the other hand, I didn’t do anything wrong. I was confused. I didn’t know how to talk to Mother anymore. I didn’t want to talk to her anymore until the day for my monthly appointment at the hospital.

“Mom, I don’t want to go to the hospital. Every time when the doctor examines it, he leaves scratches on it.”

“Dear, the doctor knows what is best for you. Soon the horn won’t bother us anymore.”

“But Mom!”

“No but! Now wear your seatbelt and be quiet.”

Fearing that the we would argue again in the car, I decided to shut up for now.

It was the usual checking routine. The doctor had been following my case since the horn started to grow. It started as a little tooth but now it was about ten centimeters long. So the doctor suggested that we should wait until it was fully grown before he could decide what would be the best treatment for me, and before that, we only needed to go once a month.

When we entered the doctor’s room, he greeted us with a very disgusting smirk. I hated his smile, which was like the smile of the butcher soothing the little lamb when it entered the slaughterhouse. So, I shifted my eyes to the rest of the room, not looking at him. I noticed in the corner stood a horse statue decoration, which was probably made out of clay, though it wasn’t smooth and shiny as other clay artwork I’d seen before.

“What’s that?”

The doctor’s eyes moved towards where I was pointing, and said, “Oh just an art project I was doing in my free time. Anyway, enough chit chat.” Then he started measuring the length and the radius of my horn from the bottom to the tip top. “Well, it seems that your horn hasn’t been growing for three months, the length has stayed at 10 centimeters for a while. Mrs. Henderson, I believe she is ready for the treatment.”

My mother gasped, and her eyes teared up. She couldn’t help but show a smile on her face.

“Thank you, doctor! Oh dear, thank you!” her mouth shouted out praises. She thanked the doctor, the nurses, and God...

“She will be normal. She will be my good girl again...She will be...” Her words were soaked in tears of joy.

“But Mom, why can’t I keep it? It isn’t harming me at all! It might have scared you once...but I won’t let it happen again—”

“Shush! We know what’s best for you. You don’t need the horn.”

“But...”

“Shush!”

The doctor sat on the other side of the table, watching this drama as he prepared the paperwork for Mother to sign papers to sell me off. And of course, mother signed it without hesitation. I felt like as she signed, she wasn’t signing on the paper but on me, on my thin skin, claiming that I was hers.

A painful heat emerged from my chest, but I could not release it. The volcano wanted to emit, but I swallowed the lava back. I turned my head, so no one could see my nose go red.

“Is this it?” I thought. After all she still thought I was abnormal... that I was a monster with a horn, and I could do nothing to change her mind, to stop her... I could say nothing more, nothing more.

The day of the removal was set on the coming Monday. The doctor said we should do it as soon as possible. I changed into the pure white patient gown, then they put me on a movable bed. I couldn’t help twiddling the pale gown on me when the nurse pushed me into the operation room. Mother waved me goodbye. Her face lit up like the sun, which was too bright to look at that my eyes burned in pain.

But the pain didn’t last long, because he came and put me to sleep...

I saw a unicorn in my deep consciousness. Her alicorn was more majestic than my tiny one, so strong and beautiful that numerous selfish and greedy men were there to hunt for it. People were holding weapons and nets and traps. But she protected herself well, with her beautiful

sword, cutting through the way to freedom. I thought she could win, but when she was almost through the dark woods, I saw the side of her horn crack. Then slowly the crack spread to the other side and smoothly it went all the way to the end. When it finished, there was no unicorn - it was just a horse, tamed and quiet. She was crying. We cried together.

When my eyes finally opened again, I saw Mother near my bed. Her eyes smile with wrinkles and full of love, and I felt suffocated in her love. I touched my forehead, smooth and dull, bandages having replaced my horn.

“Take some rest, sweetie. You will be just fine.”

Shut up, shut up, shut up!

I wanted to yell at her, wanted to scream at her, but my head feeling lighter reminded me I had lost my sword, my light, and a part of me. So what was the point of yelling?

“Yes, I will mother.”

Then she took out my plush unicorn and put it by my side. She kissed my bandage and said goodnight. Night fell outside the window. I just awoke from a deep sleep and now I did not want to go back into it again. I was afraid that I would see that horse again, her cries echoing in my ears. I grabbed my unicorn, touched its horn with my fingertip. Soft... then I took out my scissors from the drawing pack mother gave me, and chop chop chop sliced the horn off the plush. I ripped off my bandage and used it to wrap the horn back to my forehead. But it wasn’t mine. It wasn’t my horn. It kept falling. The cotton inside dropped on the bed, until there was no cotton in the horn anymore, leaving just a thin skin of it, light as air.

A few days later, I was ready to go back home. My unicorn plush ended up in the garbage. Mother was pleased. She said I shouldn’t

play with toys anymore anyways. Before leaving, Mother and I went into the doctor's room again for follow-up treatment and some other reminders. My face was emotionless, plain and bland, tasteless candy in my mouth. The doctor and my mother started babbling. My eyes shifted once again. From the ceiling to the window, to the bed, to the chairs, to the pictures on the wall, then the corner. The clay horse... it wasn't a horse anymore...right in the middle of its forehead, a cone-shaped tiny white horn was attached, as delicate as a spiral seashell washed to the shore.



Poetry

Many People Come to Visit and Bring Wine

By James REED

Based on "Many People Come to Visit and Bring Wine After I Fell Off My Horse"

by Du Fu

I am the respected elder of the residence behind me.
My sustenance is met, and I waved a golden scepter.
My home and my village are a distant memory.
The hooves hit the ground harder and harder.

The city gates placed by the mountains,
From far above, they fell.
The arrows launched so fast and uncertain.
Purple rains made the clouds swell.

Villages and temples filled with people,
The bride saw the crimson road.
Thousands were left under the steeple.
Protect and make haste, so I was told.

How was I supposed to see the road ahead?
When my horse kept pacing and I was soaked.
The sweat and blood left by the dead
Were a constant common in the dangerous road.

It would have taken one step into death,
The stakes were high since the arrows fell.
In human life, indulgence is an arduous quest.
Several hundred stayed in the shell.

I wasn't interested in such a waste of time.
Life is broken, and this is evidence.
Being in the sunset is a crime -
To take in such a sight is providence.

Sharing it with you is a difficult task,
I need support to speak with you.
And only then we partake and bask
Partaking wine in a good view.

After the arrows have landed, the toll is set.
The worst is over, and now we celebrate.
Together seeing the sun, the moment we bet
Our lives on a better future to commemorate.

Why did you have to hurry your horse?
Our shelter was strong enough for protection.
Our leader ran an unfortunate course
But his speed made him the only exception.

Theomachy

By Bianca REYES

1. Perses

The tornado of Pandora's box broke down
the dam walls of Aphrodite's eyes.
Her guards tossed, washed over and drowned,
succumbing to the flood and the brine.

Fresh saltwater gushed out of the cracks,
The concrete crumbled pathetically.
Through the rampage, destruction, pain and attack
Resulted in only one casualty.

2. Eris' Fountain

break, heart, break
i dare you to.
to suffer the pain
that we went through.

tasteless gibberish, chafing remarks.
a fling of fast slurs.
a tense sting of frustration,
my waterfall's lure.

dumb damn dam walls,
supposed to last forever.
it couldn't, why couldn't it,
just hold it together?

but i'm unfazed.
unafraid.
unashamed.
no escape. i'm okay.

he'll see.
i'm out this maze--

break, heartbreak,
i dare you to.
to suffer the pain
that i went through.

3. Eleos

Two pink roses; translucent and wilted.
My saltwater couldn't lull them to life.
My wooden twig, a little bent and stilted,
wouldn't help the white ones up right.

But flowers can bloom again.
The winter won't wait for me.
I'll replant the seeds and then
they'll find new roses by the sea

So the tornado of Pandora's box cannot break down
the dam walls in front of my eyes.
My soldiers not tossed, washed over or drowned,
never succumbing to the flood and the brine.

Goodbye

By TAM Tsin Lui

I drove her to a small cottage beside the beach, just like the one Hansel and Gretel lived in, everything was

Revealed, he wasn't at his office that Saturday night, I didn't

Realize she was such a beauty until I examined her closely, her cheeks were

Flushing, he shoved me in rage, Oh Shit

This was so good, I never knew kissing could be so heavenly, I knew she was

The person who could be possibly killing me anytime, I was petrified

That someday I might lose this girl but I knew I won't

Love him, love without faith is like religion without faith,

She tossed her hair and it smelled like caramel and banana, the sweetness

Have always blinded me from seeing the real him, his words of love trapped me

Into this room where two lonely people became less lonely because of

The lie, the deleted message, the scornful ring and a barbie pink underwear,

Nothing more was left to pursue since I have found you

The person who leaves me with sleeping pills who madly, awaits

For his girl to say yes. And you did.

I did. I tried my best to stand out from your colleague's obese and uneducated housewives

You are changed, you incredibly spy on everything, you

Were drunk on our marriage anniversary and I saw this text

We are nothing more than working partners, maybe friends

When did you last give me your dainty schoolboy smile?

I am not living someone who's not trusting me by looking into my eyes

I am not living with someone who did nothing to gain my trust

13 Lessons on Creative Writing

By KONG Kam Yin

I

Fill in the blanks:

Poetry is _____

II

Rearranging

Lines

And

Poetry

Is

Words

III

List Organize Delete Write

Choose Words Filter Connect

IV

Write

(Between lines)

Your own thoughts and

(Re-)

Create Poems.

V

Techniques tend to be taken.

Rhymes have readers awakened.

Alliteration might not be effective

While self-contradictory could be defective.

VI

Tone matters? Nonsense!

Y'all listen! Tone doesn't bring no effect to the poem!

sO WRite dIRecT TeLL yOU fEEl

Narrative alters not meaning.

VII

This is not a poem, Xi Xi
It's not a poem
Not a poem
A poem
Poem

VIII

Follow classic form.
Omit some of rules.
Create your own works.

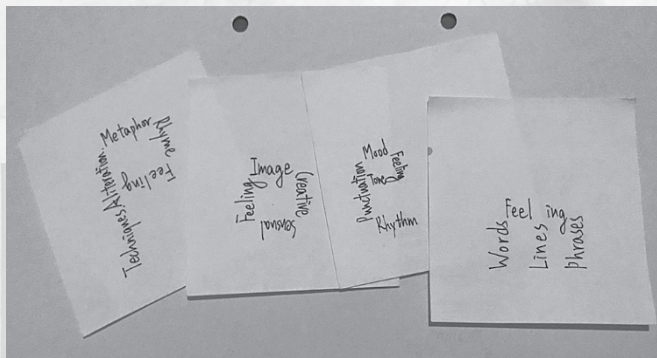
IX

Plant an image in soil.
Water it with details and
Shape it with creativity.
Yield the sweetest fruits,
Poetry.

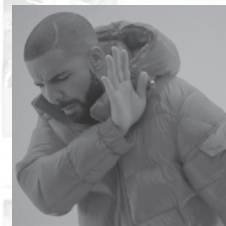
X

As writers, pens are all we need
Papers and inks would be our steed
Badmouth foe in works
Make them a jerk
Who says words wouldn't make one bleed

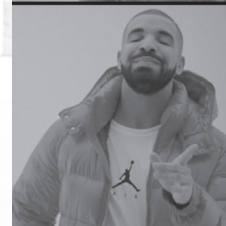
XI



XII



Write a poem with
papers and pens?



Let memes and computers
take their place.



Modern problems require modern solutions

XIII

Lessons to write
Not to express.
Lessons for skills
Not for feelings.
If poetry doesn't work
Let dramas take their places.
If words doesn't help
Let pictures do their parts.
The crown is never on a genre but
Humanity.

Four in One

By ZHANG Qirui

I have never seen them three.
But we can sit at a table,
Making up a world
less than 30 centimeters wide.
I don't know what they look like
until I finish my pineapple crisp bread.

I see the pretty girl wiping
her lipstick with a tissue.
I notice the shiny diamond ring
on that madam's finger.
I say thanks to the old man with glasses
who helped me order my dishes in Cantonese.

Then the madam leaves with the soup
still hot in her bowl.
Our world comes to an end.

But when a tall boy sits down in her place,
complaining how crowded it is,
a new era begins.

We're a piece of time.
Crashed by the clock in bureau.
Fallen into four parts at one table.

All we know
is touch and go.

We're a piece of aloneness.
Squeezed by the precious land,
fallen into four strange ones.
What we find
is heads down and silence.

Razor

By Sonja CHAU

I used to twirl with ribbons in my hair
Now I wear scarlet ribbons on
My wrists
Dotted with warm, shiny rubies.
My best friend between my fingers
Gleam. Winking with such cynicism.
“Are you sure it's enough for today?”
It taunts.
“I can make you beautiful again.”

Each cut is a little death
The little dancing girl fades into
A distant dream.
With each slice, I get to breathe again
Surfacing from the sea of sorrow.
Maybe I can bleed the monsters out
I whisper.
I can be beautiful again.

My Student

By Tang Yuk Ching

Standing on a frozen lake with thousands of bubbles trapped in the ice.

9:30 p.m. Fighting in a battlefield of paper and pencils.

Words are scattered stars and she could not fathom them into constellation.

Knitted eyebrows, curled lips and a blank stare.

She thought of herself as a defective machine.

9:30 p.m. The clock stopped working.

For me

By YANG Siqi

I know you are searching as usual.

After you finish the day with a midnight talk show,

Screen light shines in the darkening room.

I know you are searching,

Trying to stand in a crowded metro train,

Smells and breath surround you.

I know you are searching under the sofa,

Where there is empty space,

You see no way out.

I know you are searching in the office,

Pretending you are not free,

While everyone is working on their own documents.

I know you are searching

To fill in the blanks

On exam papers, personal statement and social websites.

I know you are searching to make up your resume,

Since you cannot afford

A longer period of unemployment.

I know you are searching,

When acquaintances are walking to you with

A fresh new look.

I know you are searching,

And you had to begin your endless adventure,

Since parents, television, teachers and peers told you so.

I know you are searching,

Because you have found
Nothing.

I know you are searching,
Because the only thing you know is to
Search.



Glass

by Ying Ying LIU (After Wallace Stevens)

1. she argues, is half-full
2. he retorts, is half-empty
3. a realist clarifies, holds exactly 217ml of liquid
4. an artist cherishes, as a murky rehab for paintbrushes
5. a mother scolds, should not be filled with iced fizzy drinks
6. a grandfather emphasizes, should always be filled with pu'er at *yum cha*
7. a student groans, is always coffee-stained at 2:00am
8. is most memorable, filled with champagne and a 3 carat promise of the broken hearted, is filled with their tenth shot of vodka
9. personified, says "Be water, my friend."
10. though glued back together, is scarred
11. could be a philosophical debate
12. could be a psychological exercise
13. personified asks, "what do you see in me?"

I do not want to fall into the trap

By YU On, Angel

I do not want to fall into the trap.
No one wants to anyway.

I remember seeing Zac Efron on TV.
He's the idealist man in the world.

Peter is walking at Waterloo Road.
I am a cat and he is a rat.

In the future kids will not learn about Archimedes.
He drowned himself
before he could have taught anyone.

In fact Zac Efron is not the best.
Peter is. Wait do I hate Archimedes less?

I want to be the boss of his small lilac house.
Josephine shall not know it.
She will puke if she knows I'm imagining a whole new world with Peter.

I know I'm dying to see him no matter how many times I see him per day.

I am a projector because I'm showing you something.

Love smells like my grandma's cooking and is something I can't taste since my arrival in Hong Kong.

The tree is the one listening to my soliloquy.
If he is here, I will... try to tell him.

This morning, I stalked him on Facebook at the Computer Room, and this evening, I will start stalking his Xanga.

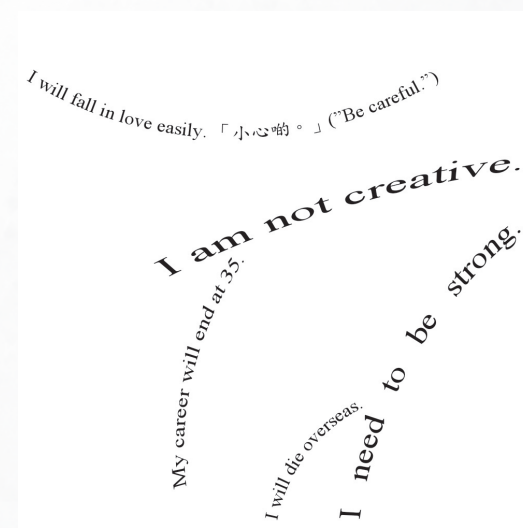
The light blue uniform reminds me of who I am.
Peter really should just be a dream.

Fortune-telling along Temple Street

By CHAN Chun Fan, Nick

Through the mist from incense,
Through all the voices claiming to have my best interest at heart,
With a shadow fixed behind me,
I settle in a red stall.

「睇掌呀嘛？用開果隻手吖。」
("Palm-reading, right? Show me the hand you usually use.")
「有啲粉紅。辛苦命啫。」
("Your palm is a bit pink. Your life will be tough.")
「睇下啲掌紋先。」
("Let's see the palm lines.")



The mist lingers,
The voices louder,
And the shadow still steadfast,
I pull out a \$500 note.

And it has never been clearer to me
That my future is my hand.

A Place I Call Home

By GAO Yik Kwan

Like a piece of driftwood
we float,
wondering the planked origins and ends,
in the cold life ocean.

Like a piece of withering leaf
we hang,
waiting to plummet into the soft mud
from a tree branch called society.

Like a kid I used to be,
I hugged my dad too tight until
I heard his back crack a little
in the curve of his spine I learn to call home.

Fear

By Kami LEUNG

Abruptly waking up,
Nothing in sight,
Gasping.
Beans of chilly sweat rolling down my cheeks,
Shivering.

Hugging my knees to my chins,
Falling asleep, again.

Bittersweet

By LAM Sabrina Jing

Something caught her eye.
A doll — Handsome,
Expensive, extraordinary, excellent.
She walks by the store every day
Just to steal a glance.
She smiles contentedly,
Then walks away in sorrow.
She can never afford it.

Fragments of a city

By LEE Yuen Yi, Katrina

Have you ever seen
Cars like ants on highways?
Where are they going and where have they been?

Passengers who hold no one's gaze,
Sunken faces and deserted dreams,
Speaking of roads unpaved.

Ladies whose eyes can't help but gleam,
On wedding dress on mannequin they'd never wear.
Still they mix flour and whip cream.

Certificates their fathers tear,
Caps still sitting on their heads,
Passions they could never share.

Polished shoes fighting to get ahead,
Briefcase hugged tight to their chest,
Still got hungry stomachs waiting to be fed.
And I wonder within these four walls,
As the cars inch closer and closer,
Where they are heading to their final calls.

The Sunflower

By LEUNG King Yin, Kelly

To Luke

You are a sunflower
with gentle petals that welcome the nectar-seeking travelers
and a strong stem that reaches for the clouds.

You are a sunflower
that doesn't seem to grow weary of
brightening the days of your beholders
with your warm glow and your infectious giggle
as if it is your mission to heal.

You are a sunflower
believing that the sun will rise
even on rainy days,
assuring people that after the darkest hours come the most enchanting
dawn.

You are a sunflower,
chasing the sun till dusk.
Your time is short,
but sufficient.
For the seeds you left
are sprouting into a field of gold.

Learning to Love Hong Kong (after Shirley Geok-lin Lim "Learning to Love America")

By LI Hiu Wang, Summer
Submitted to the Neue Zucher Zeitung

because we have our government appointed,
because she loves going against her people,
because she loves spending money on Tomorrowland,
and putting teenagers behind bars.

because we have a lot of tourists,
because we have MTR with standard screw cap,
because we have free metals in drinking water,
and because we have to be thankful to the Chinese for everything we
have!

But more importantly because we never give up!
because we cherish democracy,
because we still value our voice,
and because we still care,

because we still strive for our best in work,
because we are easily satisfied with what we have,
because we have friends and family whom we love,
because we still have hopes even when we are trapped.
because it is forever our home!

Moon

By Lorraine YU

I once knew a guy named Moon,
And I was sold
From the very first
Moment I laid eyes on his milky hue.

Under his Wiz Khalifa shirt,
Glowing like a bulb,
His Asian flush,
His schoolboy stutter,
And his accidental charm.

Later I met
Numerous guys
Joon, Hoon, Woon, and whatever who,
Still,
I find myself
Thinking of that drunken goon,
Once every full moon.

To the One I Might Never See Again

By LUI Kei Mun

Your light started shining on me from Week 4,
So bright that when you sat behind me,
My nape itched and burnt.
When I nerved myself to sit by you,
My eyes fixed to the ground and my face turned.

You seemed so far away,
When you were only a few chairs away.
I would steal a glance at you,
So brief in case you should notice.

I hope my stormy sky would not clear on Wednesdays only,
So I looked for you in the library,
Looked around wherever I was,
But you were nowhere in sight.

How lucky I was
To have met you in college,
How sad I was
To have met you only in college.

FIGHTER

By Adela JANSEN

she said,
a fighter won't be
able to
play the piano.

I said,
being able to
throw a
hook and a punch
does not
diminish my skill
to differentiate
between
pianissimo
and
fortissimo.

Gretchen

Inspired by Goethe's 'Faust'
By Angie KONG

I wished dear mama to sleep that night;
stirring up her last communion
with the devil's tongue between my thighs
because he loved me like no other.
more than his wife, more than god
or life itself — I could tell.

he raised his hell-tempered fire in me
as he pried breath after breath
from my lips, slick and wild in the bed
— and me, sown with his seed
almost instantly.

then brother dear fell dead
by my lover's hands, till
I had no family left —
but I don't know if I knew then
that I'd been lying with
the devil himself.
god only knows that the girl I was
knew not that she bore
the devil's child.

but I saw it in his eyes
the moment he tore out my womb:
the hunger in that baby boy
that I could never sate in you.

so I took that teething hell-spawn demon
and baptized him to death;
swore I would do the same to fate,
that sly and cryptic fool.

they bound me in rope
when they found out what I did
and oh, how you keened for me
— but I was freer in chains
than I ever was with you.

I didn't need you to save me
for heaven herself sang
“sie ist gerettet!”
she is saved!

truly, truly —
I could finally see through you!

Tomorrow

By CHAN Sau Kwan

I know you are in a dark place.
You're looking at the blank page
and the rotating clock
Tick tock, tick tock.

I know you are in a dark place.
Smiling at the people who insulted you in the face
Who demand the world to do what they say.

I know you are in a dark place.
Working too hard for minimum wage
Endless night shifts with no overtime pay.

I know you are in a dark place.
Everybody looks at you but nobody sees you
Passing, rubbing shoulders or stepping on your shoes.

I know you are in a dark place.
Locker door marker with white chalks and red shame
Broken, like they break you more each day.

I know you are in a dark place.
But trust me, it is only a phase
And tomorrow, tomorrow you will be okay.

Twelve Ways to Look at a Watch

By Charis CHEUNG

I

Twelve numbers

Sixty points

Each standing firmly at its own position

Learning to share the space between the past and the future

II

The man running late

The girl waiting for the class to end

The mother waiting worriedly for her daughter to come home

They check their wrists

III

The design of the strap

The shining gem on the crown

Tells your worth

But doesn't tell you how much time you got to enjoy the luxury

IV

The watch on the wrist

Hitting on unnecessary objects? Why are they unnecessary?

Scars on its body

V

Dear you

Here's a gift for you

From me

VI

Grandpa wants you to keep this

It's very important to him

So don't lose it okay?

VII

Daddy

Why are there three pins on this thing?

What about thirteen fourteen fifteen sixteen?

How do you tell it's midnight?

VIII

You didn't know it's so important

Until you left it at home

Bare wrist

You feel naked

IX

You took it for granted

You never thanked it for its hard work

You blamed it for not working

Even though it is perfectly fine

X

Two minutes until time is up

Better hurry up

Scribble scribble scribble

XI

It's better to stop counting down

"Seize the moment

and get the best out of it"

They say

XII

Time's up

Put down your pen

You may not write anything or you may risk disqualification

Day and Night

By CHOY Tik Man Mandy

Eggs and toast and breakfast chats,
the sun remains in an endless trance.
The romance lingers upon your lap,
watching the mailman and the neighbors dance.

Nighttime whispers in candlelight,
letting the moon awaken all the restless souls.
Those kisses and these passionate bites,
all flicker as lust takes its midnight stroll.

Afternoon is just more temperate,
with teas and cakes and fruitless acts.
The lovers hide in their debates,
as the day rolls out its tedious facts.

Day and night I dream and hate,
perhaps the afternoon shall paint a less inclement shade.

Fireworks near Victoria Harbour

By LEE Chung Ho

There are always fireworks at Victoria Harbour,
blooming in one second, fading the next.
Look up! Fog is in the air.

The pearl of the orient
for once shined brighter than ever
for once a beacon for fishermen
a ray of hope

The pearl of the orient
now covered in ashes of memories
now tarnishing its lustre
an obsolete jewelry

Fireworks at times of celebration
Fireworks at times of anxiety

Let's connive at the fog.

No More Hunger

By CHAN Kwun Wa Jason

I know you are hungry.
That's why you are dancing, while crying,
You turn and turn and turn, dancing without a certain kind of emotion.

I know you are hungry.
That's why you are meeting everyone you bump into,
You laugh and laugh and laugh, meeting without any regards.

I know you are hungry.
That's why you are imagining there is an apple, and acting to peel its skin.
You fake and fake and fake, just imagine, there is.

I know you are hungry,
That's why you've gone missing, and will never show up again.
I run and find and lie, going without knowing you are disappearing.

I know you are hungry.
That's why I am burning.
I will burn everything that could be your food, your soul, your nutrients.
BURN, BURN, BURN.
And there will be no more hunger.

The Purple Forbidden Asylum

By CHAN Wai Suen

Never have I derived my joy
From the royal hunting fest.
The fur of prey immersed in blood,
The lifeless eyes protest.

With shoulder smooth as fox's fur,
She leaned against his chest.
His loving gaze reserved for her.
Her back his palm caressed.

Arrows fly and horses neigh,
The signs of life divest.
Eunuchs rush to praise the king,
"The country has been blessed!"

He spotted me, his perfect queen,
Yearning flames suppressed.
One small wave and royal guards came.
How dare you! A queen turned pest.

A white-furred? Fox is a gift? From the gods,
Why are they not catching it?
Quick, hunt it down lest it escapes
And never let it wrest!

Inutile servants, pathetic guards,
They all think I'm a jest.
I snatch the arrows, I seize the bow.
I show them the queen knows best.

He held me tight, he sniffed my hair.
He made me his, with whom he walked abreast.

Now he's made a fool, seduced by jiuwei hu.
I will crush the vermin until I rest.

Never had I derived my joy
From the royal hunting fest.
The fur of fox immersed in blood
Then dried and coalesced.



Sleepwalking

By CHEUNG Ting Yu Kathleen

Chimes catching the wind by the windowsill
I stand right here missing our days
The rhymes flow out of my heart
Streaming slowly along the pebble road.

Weeping willows of light green in late autumn
kiss on my forehead
All I remember is the warmth we share
in the small muff pocket.

I walk to the end of the small drive
and walk into a bistro
I drown myself in sorrow
Humming the learnt melody of our wasted youth.

Us against the world
Struggling through the jungle
Yet the crossed destiny
For our promises to show.

Time does not linger
for that we took it for granted.
We were way too young
to realize the other side of love.

The alley we never finished walking
The life we haven't shared
When will we ever learn?
When we lay awake, toss and turn.

Learning to love Hong Kong

By Juliette HUARD

Because its skyscrapers encourage you to look up
And not down

Because it combines nature and city
Like the trees and the buildings are meant to be
Green and grey

Because it always feels warm
Like the fireplace I left home

Because it combines distance and togetherness
Strangers walking in the same direction
In line, close to one another, yet so far

Because my legs feel tired after discovering its secrets
And my heart full of bubbles

Because it is made of stress of the traffic
And calm of the sea,
Just like me

Because I find myself while getting lost in its streets
And yet, I have never felt like I did not belong

Because it made me write, reinvent
Travel and eat

Because building a home here only takes a few bamboos
Because I can feel my soul growing along with its trees.

What Does the Future Hold?

By Elinor KARL

Commitments to the ecosystem: *value* in Balance
Passing

Edges of tragedy
The morning after the storm

The sunny master shines light onto
The monster vibrant and alive, destructive
In hatred

The best and the brightest
Shaping the future
Street cleaners' humor

“Between the Gate”

WANG On Ni

Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.



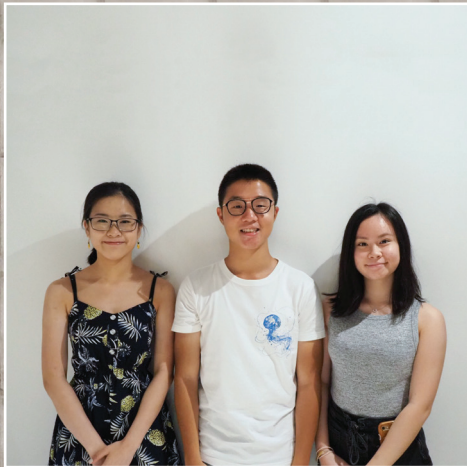
Previous Volumes:





Short Story Editors

From left to right,
Charmaine Wong,
Denise Chan,
Walter Chan



Poetry Editors

From left to right,
Bianca Rose Tio Reyes,
Chan Chun Fan Nick,
Angie Kong

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