

# CU Writing in English

-Volume XVI/2017-



**C** **u** **W**riting  
in **E**nglish

-Volume XVI/2017-

## Preface (Story Section)

We believe all of us have at least a few stories in mind that are obviously made up but tell undisputable truths, by which we live without question. Stories are like memory. They construct our beliefs, drive our actions and hinder them at the same time. Virginia Woolf once said that fiction is likely to contain more truth than fact. Naturally, one might ask: what is truth? Philosophers may consider it an unbeatable, sophisticated argument; for mathematicians, it can be a complex problem solved with intricate calculations. However, in the literary world, truth sometimes can just mean a neglected piece of our daily lives, one that needs representation to remind us of its own existence. And for that piece of life to be chosen right and represented precisely, this is where a writer's talent comes into play.

This year, we have seven short stories written by CUHK undergraduate students. Green as they all are, it is always interesting to get to know how other people fathom the world — what their “truth” is. In this little collection, there is no whimsical kingdom or wondrous magical world. On the contrary, most stories are about things that happen around us, things we experience but neglect every day. These stories, although each with its particular theme, guide us to look into ordinary, typical lives. Simple but powerful, they depict events from a perspective that we might long forget to pay attention to.

Reading about other locals' writing on our own city is one fun thing; reading one that writes about a foreign city is another. We imagine reading a foreigner's writing on our city is much more fun. We are glad to say that we have gathered all three kinds of delights in one collection. Particularly noteworthy is *That Fish*, written by a French student Lucie Goldryng. She discusses in a local Hong Konger's voice a kind of “compulsive superstition” while profiling her first-hand understanding and comments on Hong Kong culture and places. It is intriguing to see how she re-constructs Hong Kong based on her impression of different places and customs.

Now, we sincerely invite you to flip through these short stories and look closely at subtleties. We hope you find it enjoyable as we did editing them.

Tinkam Yip, Felix Lo, Sherry Shek  
Editors

## Preface (Poetry Section)

Before taking this Creative Writing course, many of us had never considered ourselves poets. However, having been through the pain of not being able to write a single word, the embarrassment of reading our first poem out loud in class, we are proud to say that we have been poets.

Many might think that writing poems requires only creativity but after this course we have learnt that the essence of poetry is courage. We need courage to experiment with different styles, to write on contrasting topics, to present our work to others and to be criticized. We do not seek to be professional poets but to be courageous writers.

Being a poet does not mean writing like Plath, Frost or Keats; it means to be vulnerable, to get in touch with our deepest feelings and to have the courage to transform these feelings into words. If novels are movies, poems are music videos. They capture the most precious, joyful, sorrowful and doubtful moments of our lives. These moments are combined into a few to a few hundred words that sing their own, unique melodies to the readers.

In this year's edition of CU Writing, we hope to show you the courage we have gained through this challenging yet inspiring journey of creating poetry. We also hope that you can be inspired by our courage and embark on a creative journey of your own.

Choi Lok Ching Caesar  
Christine Vicera  
Chung Kai Qing Juliana  
Editors

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*Story*



## You've Got a Notification

by Jaclyn FONG

It is foggy outside. The sky, the road, the trees, the buildings are covered by a white veil as if they were long untouched furniture in an abandoned house. In San Francisco it is common to have days like this in summer, but the fog this time has already lasted for a while.

There is still an hour left before I need to head out to pick up my daughter from school. Having finished cleaning the windows, I decide to use the time to check my friends' updates on Facebook. I would say Facebook is one of the best inventions in this century. It brings a lot of convenience to our lives. You can easily get connected with your long-lost friends by adding them as friends on Facebook. You can also like and follow the pages that you are interested in to receive related information or the most updated news. Checking my news feed from time to time has become my daily routine as I do not want to be left behind. It is also an escape from the reality. Life becomes less exciting after graduating from college. We all have gone on the same life path: finding a job, finding a wife, getting married, raising our children. At least this is what most of my friends and I have done. Most of us have given up our dreams and passion in exchange for a stable life.

I have not seen my friends from college or from high school as often since my daughter was born. I have been busy earning money and taking care of her. My wife and I have set up our own drapery business. We own a small shop downtown for displaying our products, and my wife usually stays there to help the walk-in customers. I, on the other hand, stay at home to run our online business. I need to manage our webpage, our online shop on eBay and contact our suppliers. Apart from that, I also need to bring my daughter to school in the morning and pick her up in late afternoon on weekdays. I do not have time to have reunions with our old friends. Or I should say I have already entered another stage of life, where I have got my own family to take care of and have more concerns about life. Facebook, therefore, has become the main connection between me and my friends. Through reading their updates on Facebook, I can have a peep into their

recent life, knowing that they are doing well. But these years things have got less interesting on Facebook. My friends from high school and college do not post updates as frequently as they did. Maybe it is because they are also busy with their adult lives now. I remember when we first started using Facebook, we were stunned by its convenience and we kept on adding people we knew or barely knew. We were eager to share the pictures we took and the things that happened in our daily lives with others. Yet these days most of the people are just re-sharing the posts they have read from other pages; they do not have the time or are no longer interested in sharing things about themselves. Even so, I can still gain some understandings of their recent lives by the information they have shared. The ones sharing parenting articles and videos are usually new parents, while the ones sharing quotes from celebrities are usually undergoing hardships in life. Through these posts I can still get the pictures of my friends' lives. I still feel connected with them in some sense.

As I am reading the posts on my news feed to kill time, a particular post catches my attention.

*American found dead in Phuket hotel room - US Daily*

I click on the shared link of the news article for more details. It is bizarre. How could this happen? Having just booked my trip to Thailand with my family next month, I need to know what happened to that poor tourist. A large picture is shown at the top when I click into the website. It is a typical summery photo that you can find when you google Thailand - a beach with white sand and boundless sea view. I wonder why the editor chose this photo. Isn't it about a murder? I scroll down to read more.

*A dead body was found in a hotel room in Phuket this morning. It was later confirmed by the Thai police that it was Joshua Brown, a 27-year-old American who traveled to Thailand with his friends two weeks ago. The cause of his death is now under investigation ...*

A shiver runs down my spine. The name of the unfortunate victim is so familiar to me. Joshua Brown, how could I not remember this name? He was the captain of the Red House when we were in high school, while I was the captain of the Blue House. Joshua was a bright and sporty student. He loved sports and he was also good at sports as well. In junior forms, he was



the captain of the basketball team and I was one of his teammates. Although I sometimes saw him as my competitor, I must admit he was an outstanding one. He was the one with the best skills in our team. I remember on one occasion he told us his dream was to travel around the world before 30. We all believed that he would make it. He was unlike us, he was always clear about his goal and he never failed. I hope the unlucky man in Phuket was not him.

I quickly type Joshua Brown in the search box of Facebook. A bunch of users show up, and I realize I got three friends with the same name. Who is the Joshua that I am looking for? I take a closer look of their profile picture. The one with a guy wearing a colorful Hawaiian shirt and holding a surfboard should be him, as I know he had lived in Hawaii for a while after he graduated from college. I suddenly realize I have not received any news of him for years, maybe for four years, or five, I cannot remember. The last update about him was he moved to Hawaii. I think I heard it from a friend who went to the same college with him. I click on the small icon and enter his profile page. The cover photo of his page is a beach with white sand and a splendid sea view. It is a typical beach you can find in Thailand. My grip of the mouse becomes slippery because of the cold sweat from my hand.

The last time he published a post was a week ago. It was just a few photos without any caption. In the photos he was standing in front of a golden temple with steep roof, putting his hands together. He did not change much after all these years, just with a shorter haircut and more muscular arms. I switch my focus to the temple behind him. I have seen it when I was doing research for my Thailand trip. It should be Wat Phra Kaew in Bangkok. That means he was in Thailand. No way. This could not happen. I can feel my hands trembling. I do not dare to scroll down to read more.

Joshua and I have not contacted each other for years after graduating from high school. Although I am a member of the alumni association committee, and am supposed to keep in touch with the graduates of my high school, we have not talked to each other. Most of the updates about him were from his Facebook posts. However, as he did not update much and we did not interact on Facebook frequently, I seldom saw his posts appearing on my news feed. As time went by, I had become unaware of his posts as

well as the new updates about his recent life. He gradually disappeared from my life. Yet this was not what I want. Although Joshua and I were not close friends, he still took a great part in my high school life. He was one of the people that I would mention if I was asked to talk about my high school era. I would share with others his outstanding tactics in playing basketball. I would share with others his witty responses to teacher's questions in class. I would share with others his passion in pursuing his dreams, how he showed his plan to us to prove that he had already planned out his future. But I never had a chance to talk about him with the others. In fact, I seldom talk about my past with my new friends in person. After having Facebook, I spent less time to talk with my friends in person. We see Facebook as a part of the connection in our friendship and a way to know more about each other. Even for Joshua, we did not even talk to each other after graduation. Being friends on Facebook does not mean being friends in real life. How could I call someone a friend if I do not interact with him in real life? It is said that technology makes people become closer and keeps people connected, but this certainly does not apply to the case of Joshua and me. Joshua's posts never appeared on my news feed, and in the past years I did not intend to find out more about his recent life. Not until I read the news of his death do I remember him. How sarcastic it is! I hope he had already pursued all his dreams.

I take a deep breath and start rolling the mouse scroll wheel with my finger. I go through Joshua's posts carefully as if they are the flashback of his short life. I know this is just a useless action but I still read the posts closely as if I was in a reunion with my long-lost friend, listening to his story about how his life had been in the past years. It seems that Joshua loved sharing photos of the places he had been to on his page. I try to gather some hints about the cause of his death from his posts, but I failed. The latest post was a week ago, showing that he was in Bangkok. Since then there was no other update. Nothing looks suspicious in those photos. I even do not know who he was with during the trip. Maybe he traveled alone, or maybe not, but there must be someone helping him take these photos. Did he encounter bad people in Thailand? Or did he die because of some sudden diseases such as heart attack? I cannot find any answer. Apart from photos,



there are also a few live video clips on his page. It seems that he enjoyed doing live video broadcast when he was traveling. I watch a bit of his live video in Vietnam last month. He was roaming on a street with a pretty blonde girl, who seemed to be his girlfriend. They just bought some fresh fruit cups and were sharing them together. They looked happy. I wonder whether this girl was with him when he was in Bangkok. How did she react when she found Joshua dead?

I keep scrolling down to look for more clues, and I discover something strange. There is a post of him asking opinions from his Facebook friends about Thailand resort recommendations. Under that post a friend of his commented, yet the comment was in Thai. From the name and the profile picture of that person I could tell she is a Thai. She was with heavy makeup and wearing a black tube dress. Her dress was so tight that all the curves of her body were shown. She is the kind of woman that my wife would be very worried if I befriended her. I wonder why Joshua had such a friend on Facebook. I click *See Translation* to find out what the comment was about. The English translation is generated after a few seconds. Free stay the sea view. It looks so confusing. I stare at the fragmented sentence and try to link all the incidents together to form a complete story: Joshua went to Phuket alone and asked for a free stay at a resort recommended by an unknown Thai woman he knew on Facebook and...

*Ding.*

A chat box window pops up at the bottom right corner of the webpage. It is Andrew, the chairperson of the alumni association committee. He was one year younger than me but he also knew Joshua because he was in the basketball team as well.

*Hey Sam*

*Yes?*

*Have you read the news? Is the man killed in Phuket the Joshua we know?*

*I think so... he was in Thailand*

*Oh my... I'm really sorry to hear that...*

*:(*

*Should we post something on our Facebook Page? Just to say*

*something about Joshua...*

*Maybe we should, I still can't believe it...*

*Could you help? You were closer to him and I'm now at work*

*No problem*

I never thought the first time I share with others about Joshua would be the news of his death. I believe none of us expected this news too. We are all living an ordinary life and walking steadily on the path of our life. We are still not yet 30 and no one expects death to strike us so soon. Joshua's death is such a great loss not only to his family but also to us. He was indeed a remarkable alumnus, as he was an active student and took part in many student affairs when he was still at school. Everyone knew his name back then. Many of us admired him. Girls wanted to date him and boys wanted to be part of his group. I was one of the lucky ones whom he considered friends at school. The news will be a bomb to our community. I wonder had he done the same thing like us after graduation what would have happened to him. Yet this would definitely not be the Joshua we knew. And now at least he ended his journey in an adventurous way in his style as always.

I enter the Facebook page of the alumni association and switch my identity to the page admin to write a post. However, I do not know how to start. It is really difficult to write a post about the death of a person you knew, especially when the post is about your long-lost friend in high school. Should I write a long passage about the things I remember about him or just some words of remembrance and let others fill the rest? Not knowing what I should write, I decided to share the link of the news article with a short caption, tagging him in the post.

*You are always our star, **Joshua Brown**. You'll be missed.*

I quickly close the window after I pressed the Publish button. Announcing the news of your friend's death to the others is so heartbreaking. I can feel a huge lump in my throat. I cannot imagine the pain his family is suffering. As a parent, I do not dare to imagine.

*Ding.*

*Ding.*

*Ding.*

*Ding.*



...

*My phone on the desk keeps ringing because of the notifications from Facebook. I look at the screen and watch people reacting to my post and leaving comments.*

*Kathrine Johnson reacted to **Redwood High School Alumni Association's** post: "You are always our star..."*

*Peter Myers reacted to **Redwood High School Alumni Association's** post: "You are always our star..."*

*Oliver Moore commented on **Redwood High School Alumni Association's** post: "You are always our star..."*

*Adeline Blake reacted to **Redwood High School Alumni Association's** post: "You are always our star..."*

...

Notifications boxes are popping up quickly. I am glad that many people share the same feelings with me on this matter. Many people still remember Joshua. They care about him. They mourn his death. Although Facebook sometimes does not do its job well by showing all the updates from your friends, it is still a platform to connect people. The sad news is now spreading rapidly in our community. Soon later Joshua's family and friends may hold his funeral, and most of us will be prepared. We will be prepared to accept our loss.

The fog outside seems to have lifted a bit; at least the visibility is not as bad as before. I can see the olive tree at the corner of our street. Before I leave home to pick up my daughter, I decide to have a last check on the reactions and comments that I received for the post to see if any of Joshua's close friends has reacted to it. I go to Facebook and click on the icon of notification. I cannot take my eyes off the screen when I see the messages in the notification center. The first notification is about the post I have published about Joshua's death. 50 reactions and 43 comments are received within 10 minutes, and the number is still growing. Yet what catches my attention is not this notification. Right under it there appears another notification with a small picture of a man wearing a colorful Hawaiian shirt and holding a surfboard. A short sentence is on the right.

***Joshua Brown** is live now.*



## That Fish

by Lucie GOLDRYNG

It's Saturday night. Parker smokes a cigarette downstairs of the bar. He's alone. He stands, leaning against the wall. The street is sombre and empty. You can only hear the hushed noise of the bustle of the city, far away. A neon sign on the building in front of him spreads a halo of soft light on the facade. A car passes by. The neon letters are reflected on the gleaming bonnet, for a short instant, taking the shape of a bright moving animal. The car turns around the corner and the silence comes back.

A couple goes down the street, holding hands. They don't seem to notice him. It's very hot. The air is heavy, humid. A thunderstorm is probably coming. Outside, Parker can feel the air-con working through the open door. The heat hits him. He's wrapped in the muggy atmosphere together with the smoke of the cigarette. The coolness of the inside is tempting. His friends are upstairs, drinking beers and laughing. His cigarette goes out. He lights up another one.

He finally enters the building. He walks up the stairs, slowly. The music becomes louder and louder as he climbs the steps. Scents of rum and wine float in the staircase. As he opens the door of the bar everything increases by tenfold, the smells, the sound, the loud guffaws.

— Parker, where have you been all this time?

— I was smoking.

— Here, have a beer.

— Parker, did you know that Crystal isn't with Andrew anymore?

— No, I didn't.

— We all agree we should help her find another guy, what do you think?

— If you think it's a good thing to do.

He takes a seat on the big couch next to the guy who just talked to him. He's quiet. His friends are getting drunk. The loudness rises. The jokes are getting dirtier. He doesn't feel the alcohol. He is drinking his sixth beer, or maybe seventh. He doesn't feel it. He feels sober, too sober maybe. The discussion goes onto love affairs and other gossips. He listens, passively.

From time to time, he laughs, in spite of himself. Before going back to his thoughts, one of the girls stands up.

— Guys, let's go out tonight!

They all get up, they cheer and chug their beer.

— Why don't you cheer with us, Parker?

— Come on!

They are in the street now. They are heading to a night club, walking all together arm in arm. They sing, they shout. Their walk is stumbling. Parker follows them. One of the guys tries to kick a pigeon on the sidewalk. He misses it and falls on the ground, still laughing. The street is getting more and more crowded and noisy. They arrive at this center of Hong Kong's night life, this area that lives only by night. During the daytime, the streets seem calm, quiet and clean. But when the sun disappears the bars are full; the clubs are flowing people and music into the street. The crowd is compact, hard to find their way. Lan Kwai Fong. LKF. Hell KF.

The group enters a club. They go straight to the dance floor. They are on fire. The hips are swaying. Parker sits down at the bar, watching them. After two songs he can't handle it anymore. He tries to call his friends. Then he leaves.

He doesn't know for how long he's been walking. The sun is rising already. He's peaceful, finally. It feels good to be alone. He's not a loner usually. He has friends, he's funny, outgoing, talkative. Not tonight.

The sky is turning grey, the stormy clouds pile up on top of the skyscrapers, saturated with water. The rain is coming. Parker's skin is glossy, his brow dotted with beads of sweat. Finally the rainstorm. First a few drops hit the ground, some big round drops that explode noisily. A lightning splits the sky in two and a clap of thunder hits the city almost at the same time. Parker keeps walking under the pouring rain, in two minutes he's completely wet.

Prince Edward, exit B2. When he walks out of the MTR station the sky is blue again and the air feels fresher. Time to go home and get some sleep. Nathan Road is waking up, the workers are out already. Mannings, MacDonald's, Wellcome, LukFook Jewelry. His feet know the way. He



goes past the goldfish market, like everyday.

But today, by instinct, he stops. Today he stops in front of the fish. The fish he saw hundreds of times without looking at. Today he gapes at them and today he decides to buy one. He takes the time to choose. They look so nice. So many colors, red, yellow, orange, even some blue ones. They live in plastic bags. Small plastic bags, smooth and transparent, filled with water and pinned to the wall. While he looks at them he has the feeling they are staring at him. He chooses a white one with a red spot on the forehead. He carefully picks up the round bag from the wall, pays the old owner of the shop and walks away with his new fish.

\*

He looks in his kitchen for something where he could put the goldfish. He chooses a big empty jam jar that he fills up with water and drops the animal in it.

— I hope it's not too narrow for you.

The fish moves his tail. He seems happy.

— I'm glad you like it, dear friend.

He puts the jar on the kitchen table.

— I'll get you a bigger home. Don't worry.

Parker prepares himself a coffee and sits at the table, facing his fish.

— I have to find you a cool name. I used to have a goldfish when I was as a kid. My sister and I called him Plouf, we read it from a book. That's how they say splash in French. Then he died after two days so my father got us a new one. We called him Plouf II the Ugly, because he had two big eyes popping out of his forehead. I think that was a pretty cool name. How should I call you? I mean I can't call you Plouf III it would bring bad luck, I think. Hum let's see ... What about Mr. Goldfish? That's a good name ! We also had a cat once. We called him The Cat. What do you think?

He taps the fish bowl, gently, and the fish moves his tail fin, again.

— I knew you would like it.

\*

Parker wakes up with a start. 10:00 am. He's so late, his class starts at 10:30. He jumps out of his bed and runs to the shower.

— Breakfast time, Mr. Goldie.

He pours some food flakes in the fish bowl.

— Do you think the weather is going to be nice today?

— I don't know if I should take an umbrella with me.

The fish moves his tail.

— Yeah, you're right. I'm taking one. One never knows these days.

Parker arrives late in class, as expected. He sits next to his friend. The teacher is talking about the knee's anatomy.

What happened to you?

— I didn't hear my alarm.

— The teacher gave our midterm back. You got the best grade as always.

— Nice.

Parker looks pensively through the window. Outside it's raining buckets.

\*

It's been one month since Parker found his new friend. Mr. Goldfish and he really get along. Parker talks to him all the time. He's happy to have someone in his empty flat. After class, he rushes back home to go to him. He tells him how his day went, how annoying people were, how boring classes were. He talks, he talks, he talks. The fish is quiet but Parker knows that he feels him. He's a mindful listener. Parker takes the fish bowl with him everywhere he goes in his flat. They watch TV together, they eat together, Mr. Goldfish sleeps on the nightstand, stays on the washing machine when Parker is taking a bath, in the kitchen when he cooks.



Parker takes up the habit of asking his fish every time he's hesitating about something. He would ask him if he should cook rice or noodles, if he should wear a coat or a jacket, blue socks or red socks, watch TV or read a book. It's like playing heads or tails. Should I answer this SMS? Should I finish my homework now? Should I accept this invitation? The fish is never wrong.

The fish turns out to be a good adviser. He helps Parker to deal with a lot of stuff, like dating the girl he has liked since high school. Parker now trusts the fish with his life. He's deeply convinced his fish has something.

\*

It is Saturday night, exactly two months since the fish arrived in the flat. Parker decides to spend the evening with his pet for the occasion. He warms up a frozen pizza and turns on the TV. He sits on the couch, the fish bowl on his knees. He crumbles some stale bread in the water. Goldie swims fast, he's eating joyfully. *In the Mood for Love* is playing tonight. Parker's phone starts beeping. An unknown number is calling him. He seizes the phone and asks his fish:

— Do you think I should pick up?

The fish stays still. His tail fin doesn't move. Parker turns off the phone and resumes the movie.

A few hours later his phone beeps again. His classmate is calling. It wakes him up. The movie is over but the TV is still on. He doesn't remember falling asleep but the fish bowl lays on the coffee table. He picks up.

— Hey Parker! Did you get the call from Professor Wong?

— Professor Wong the Hospital headmaster? No, I didn't, why?

— He was looking for an intern this summer. I told him to call you.

— Wait, when was he supposed to call?

— A few hours ago.

— No way. Yes he called me, I didn't answer.

— Why didn't you pick up your phone? But now it's too late!

— My fish told me not to.

— Your fish?

Silence.

— I'll call you back later.

Parker puts down his phone, slowly, very slowly, and stares at his fish.

— What did you make me do? I'm screwed, I'm fucking screwed.

I thought you wanted to help me make my own choices. You know how hard it was to get this internship? You know what it means for me? Fuck I shouldn't have listened to you!

He's shouting almost. He's mad, very mad. He catches the fish bowl and goes out. He walks for a long time, very fast. He arrives at the waterfront in Tsim Sha Tsui. It's full of tourists taking pictures of the bright skyline. He doesn't pay attention to them. He passes the fence and stands in front of the water. Then, bit by bit, he pours the water of the fish bowl into the sea. People are staring at him. He doesn't care. At last the fish comes out of the fish bowl and with the last drop of water he meets the water of the sea. Gone.

Parker stays there for a while, contemplating the reflection of the building in the dark deep waters. His fish is there, somewhere. He won't last long in the salt.

He's walking now. He reviews the last couple of days in his mind. He calls his friend back.

— Hey man, what are you up to right now?

— I'm home reading a book, why?

— Would you join me for dinner?

— Sure. Let's go to Chunking Mansion to have some nice curry.

— Sounds good.

They meet in front of Chunking Mansion. The place is full as always. *No thanks, we don't need a watch. No thank you, We don't want drugs. Don't worry, We'll find our way to the restaurant ourselves. That's ok, we'll get your VIP card for the Taj Mahal another time.* They find their way through the insistent smugglers. They arrive at a gloomy restaurant where



they are the only customers, apart from an old Indian man at the back of the room who's drinking tea loudly.

— You wanna talk?

— Man, I messed up.

— What's happening to you lately? We all noticed you've been acting weirdly.

— I don't know. I wasn't doing well, I don't really know why.

— Maybe the pressure has been too harsh on you ?

— I don't know. I couldn't tell. Anyway, the thing is. I bought a fish.

— Oh, that fish you were telling me about.

— Yes, well. I was talking to this fish all the time, I think it helped me get better. I started believing that he was answering my questions. I was trusting him for everything.

— You mean you thought the fish was answering you back ?

— Come on, I'm not completely mad. No, when I was asking him a question, if he was moving, it was a yes, if not, it was a no.

— It's pretty funny actually.

— It was indeed, at the beginning. But tonight I didn't pick up the phone because of him. It went too far. I was getting a bit crazy I think.

\*

Walking out of the Chunking Mansion, Parker hesitates. He's tired. He would like to go home but walking a bit could be good, thinking about what happened. He's undecided, in front of the crosswalk, and he hears a voice «You should go home old man, get some sleep». Parker looks around him. He's alone in the street. He looks more carefully, on his left, on his right. No one. He looks down. At his feet, there is a cat talking to him.



## The Form

by PANG Wai Ching

“From a medical point of view, I would suggest you sign this form so that your father won’t have to suffer as much as he is suffering now.”

“Do people actually do this? Killing their own fathers?” said Stephanie sarcastically, staring at the doctor, who was sitting beside her on a bench outside the ward.

“Well... I wouldn’t say it’s killing,” the doctor looked away as he explained. “Some people think it’s better to let him go. Anyway, I will give you time to think about it and discuss with your family.” He stood up, straightened his suit and turned around to Stephanie. He put his hand on her shoulder and said, “Let me know your decision.”

Stephanie felt the weight of his hands pushing her down on her seat. Her brain was empty and her body stiff. She could not leave her seat, nor could she organize her thoughts until her phone rang.

“Morning, Steph,” the voice coming from her phone temporarily saved Stephanie from her overloaded mind.

“Morning. How can I help you?” said Stephanie calmly as if she were a different person.

“I... emmmm... need your signature on several documents before noon.”

“I knew it. How many times have I told you not to leave everything to the last minute?” said Stephanie.

“I’m so sorry, Steph...”

“Leave it on my table, I am heading back.”

This was how Stephanie solved every problem as if there weren’t any, which was why she was so successful in her career. In fact, Stephanie had always been the best in every aspect. At school, she was the top of the class and the president of several societies. At work, she was the district manager of a renowned insurance company, and had won countless prizes and awards, like Best Agent of the Year, Top Ranking Award of the Year, Top Districts of the Year. Her success in her career made her the iron lady among her colleagues. At home, she had been in charge of all the bills and

household decisions since her father Jack’s retirement. Though she was the youngest in the family, she felt the responsibility to shoulder the weight of running this family, so that her sister Paige could follow her heart and do whatever she wanted. Paige was an artist. She had done quite a number of jobs. She had been in the bakery, she had been a primary school teacher, but what made her most proud was that she had been the owner of a studio where she taught children about art and created her own art works when there were no classes. She had been operating the studio for more than a decade and tried very hard to make ends meet. She managed to keep it running but nothing more than that, no expansion, no profit. Even so, Paige was able to follow her intuition as she knew Stephanie would sort out any problems ahead of her.

Stephanie took after her father in a number of ways. When she was just a little child, she saw Jack working long hours every day. She was too small to understand what Jack was doing with all sorts of glass containers. She could only remember the pungent smell when her father cleaned the bottles, which she later found out came from used nail polish. Sometimes Jack would even collect turpentine bottles and some other chemical containers and sell them for money after cleaning. She could also remember running around the house and accidentally tripping over some of the bottles, for which Jack did not reprove her at all. His only goal was to provide a better living for his family. So, this was what Stephanie was trying to do, now that she had established her career. The duty she felt sometimes became a weight pushing her down, but she could always get over it whenever she recalled how much harder life was, when Jack was supporting the family.

The first time Stephanie failed to overcome the weight on her shoulder was when the early symptoms first appeared, even before Jack was diagnosed. She noticed how her father’s hands shook when he was playing chess and that he began to forget things. Things like where he went the day before and what groceries her mother Mary asked him to bring home. The progression of Jack’s illness was exponential, but Mary and Paige took it in stride. It just meant the family had to be more patient when taking care of him. All they had to do was to choose a suitable wheel chair and sitting pads, install a seat belt to the chair and break food into smaller pieces. It is true



that they had to carry out more procedures such as sterilizing everything that would come into contact with Jack and looking for wheelchair-accessible restaurants and parks, which was fine because they all understood everyone went through this stage of putting one's weight on the wheels. For sure, they all saw that day coming, but none of them really discussed what they did not have to bring up and they all pretended not to see that haunting picture coming.

Sometimes Jack's situation could even bring the family a good laugh. Once, they were having dinner at home. Jack was satisfied with the meal although the vegetables were almost like porridge due to the fact that he could not chew properly. He smiled at Paige, who went in and out of the kitchen refilling soup for everyone, placing dishes on the table and clearing them after they had finished. The smile on Jack's face was not right though. It was how you smile after having a nice meal at a restaurant, but Paige was his daughter, not a random waitress. Paige noticed the alien look but she did not take offense because she had been treating Jack like her children at her studio. Jack, sitting in his wheelchair, suddenly babbled. He was a man of few words, especially in his current situation, which made Mary and the sisters curious. They all stopped whatever they were doing and looked at him but no one could hear what he was saying. Even their mother, who was sitting beside him, could not figure out what he was trying to say. So, the sisters gathered around Jack and asked him to repeat. The words were blurred, one of the early symptoms of his disease. It took them some time to finally understand what it was.

He said, "Bill, please."

Both Mary and Paige laughed while Stephanie patiently explained to Jack that he was at home. They did not think it was a big deal but Stephanie was quite uneasy about this. "Listen, Jack. You're at home. Remember?" said Stephanie, using all her communication skills that she had picked up from dealing with difficult clients to convince Jack that he was indeed at home. She felt weak when things were out of her control. She felt insecure to be weak. After all, she had been the tough one for all her life.

As days passed, more patience and treatment were needed to take care of Jack. Stephanie could not give up her work because, ironically, it

was her work that was relieving the weight she was imposing on herself. This weight she was feeling was heavier than all the boxes of documents she had ever signed throughout her entire career. Meanwhile, Paige chose to close her studio and focus on giving Jack the best attention and care.

"Papa, let's go for a walk after some warmup," Paige told her father. He nodded with a trace of confusion on his face. Paige wasn't really sure whether he understood or not, but she went on with the warmup anyway.

"Can you just leave him alone?" said Stephanie. "He needs some sleep."

"Exercising is good for him," said Paige. "That's what the doctor said." She continued holding the heel and the back of the knee of his right leg, lifting it and laying it down, going back and forth, and the same for the left leg.

"Did you buy the wet towel wipes?" asked Paige while checking his diapers.

"Oh right! I forgot," said Stephanie.

"How could you forget? I reminded you yesterday. We are running out of it. How am I supposed to change his diaper now?" Paige was annoyed.

"Okay, I am sorry but don't forget you didn't buy the thickener last time. How was he supposed to drink water without thickener? It could have choked him!" Stephanie could not help talking back.

"It was just that once. And I did buy it the next day. Please be fair." Paige was annoyed.

"So am I. It is just this once, okay? You be fair." Stephanie was always better at bargaining.

"Fine. I don't want to continue this conversation."

These conflicts arose every other day and sometimes Mary would cut in and join the "discussion" with her poor hearing. She always misheard and went on nagging both of them on a different topic. Their lives were all revolving around Jack, who began to encounter difficulty in recognizing people. His words were getting more unclear and sometimes he could not stand up from the wheelchair.

These days went on for several months as Jack's situation got worse. His coughing was continuous and for a few times he almost choked on



his own saliva. He was going in and out of the hospital, and the sisters had become experts in getting best prices for diapers, sanitized wipes, thickening powder and all types of medical equipment. At some point, they figured that it was best to install an electric adjustable bed in Jack's bedroom so that they could provide him with the best environment for rest. Paige, with her studio closed, stayed at the hospital with Mary every day. It was important to give him good care, but she knew her mother was the real concern. There were times when Jack needed to use a nasogastric tube for diet, and Mary was pissed by him whenever he tried to pull the tube.

"Hey, Jack! Don't do that!" Mary frowned. "Why aren't you listening? I keep telling you don't but you keep doing it!"

"Calm down, mum," said Paige. "He didn't mean it. I guess it's really unpleasant to have a foreign tube inserted into his nostrils," she tried to explain to her mother.

"I know... But he is just making himself suffer! If he pulled it out, the doctors would have to insert it again!! How much more pleasant would that be?" There were tears in her eyes.

"Don't worry, mum. That's why I am here," said Paige. "So that Jack can have the best care."

In the third week of hospitalization, Jack's situation had stabilized so the nurses and the physiotherapist talked to Paige about the arrangements after moving home. They taught Paige how the suction was done and when it should be done, so that she could do it at home to prevent Jack from choking on his phlegm. Paige did it calmly as if she was not Paige the artist. However, when Stephanie was learning how to do it, she was not Stephanie either. She panicked and shook, so Paige took over and carry out the suction with her stable firm hands. Since then, Paige had taken over the suction from the nurses when she was around.

One day, Stephanie came in after work carrying exhaustion and sadness. She sat down beside the bed with a heavy heart. She had been like that ever since Jack was sent to hospital. All of a sudden, the machines monitoring Jack's vitals started to beep. The alarm pounded on Stephanie's heart as the doctor and nurse rushed in. Jack was having difficulty breathing. His eyes were wide open and he was trying to pull the tube again.

"Make way please," said the doctor.

"Family, please wait outside," requested the nurse.

Stephanie, Paige and Mary reluctantly walked away from the bed and waited. They were all silent, and they could hear the painful grunting and the disturbing high-pitch sound coming out of hinges due to vigorous movement of the bed. It lasted for some minutes and they heard the rings slide through the metal bar as the doctor opened the curtain.

All three of them rushed to the doctor and asked, "How is he?"

"We have managed to take Jack's situation under control, but you should all be prepared."

After the doctor had left, there was an hour of silence among the family as they sat at his bedside, after which Stephanie took a deep breath and brought up the form.

"So... what do you think?" Stephanie tried to act calm and asked Mary and Paige.

"Don't ask me, I don't wanna imagine that," said Mary as she walked away from the bed.

"I think he has suffered enough," Paige told Stephanie.

"So?"

"The reason why he is still here is because he loves us." Paige continued.

"And then?"

"He doesn't want us to weep. But didn't you see how much he was enduring just now. With the tubes, the diaper, the drip, the suction, and now the resuscitation."

"I am aware of all that! So sign or not?" said Stephanie impatiently.

"I think it is selfish not to sign. He would leave us sooner or later. You know that," said Paige very calmly.

"I'm sorry, but I can't do it. I just can't," cried Stephanie.

Paige could totally understand her sister because she could only say in so many words what she thought they should do in words, but when it came to action, she knew she would hesitate, so she didn't blame Stephanie for being indecisive. They left the form as it was and continued monitoring the machine beside Jack and reading him newspaper.



Today was the physio day. Stephanie came during lunchtime while the physiotherapist also attended to Jack and did the chest therapy for him so that it would be easier for the nurse and Paige to do the suction. Jack was exceptionally bright today. He said to the nurse that he wanted to sit up and that he wanted to drink coke. It was all going very well, so Paige went home with Mary after watching Jack finishing his nutrient milk through the plastic tube. They went home and told Stephanie about Jack's condition. However, Stephanie did not feel the way Mary and Paige thought she would. She had a bad feeling that she was not able to articulate.

Towards midnight, the home phone rang. Stephanie somehow knew that it was from the hospital. She picked up the phone unwillingly, and heard a voice at the other end of the phone say that Jack's situation had suddenly gotten worse. They immediately rushed to the hospital, but it was too late. They all cried beside the bed but Stephanie was the loudest. She was devastated and could not let go of her father's hands, which were still warm for hours since they had arrived. Paige looked at the container of the suction cylinder, she recognized the level of the content was exactly the same as how she had left it in the afternoon.

"They did not do the suction after I left," said Paige slowly.

Stephanie squeezed Jack's hands even tighter as she heard Paige. No matter how the nurse advised that it was time to let them carry out the remaining procedures, she kept holding his hands and repeated, "I didn't sign it, I didn't." The weight she felt on her shoulder had never been lifted since the doctor padded her on her shoulder that day and asked her to consider. Until she lost all her strength and almost fainted, she was still murmuring, "I didn't sign the form."



## *Fly, Balloon, Fly!*

by Sherry SHEK

One mystery from my university life still pops up in my mind from time to time. On one cloudy day with showers and a few squally thunderstorms, I witnessed a bright orange balloon travelling in the sky. The moment I discovered this balloon it was floating up and down above some poles so I thought someone tied it up. After a few seconds, it sank. I asked my friend if a helium balloon could sink and she said it was just an ordinary kind of balloon. The orange balloon sank slowly into a nearby tree crown and became faintly visible inside the dense green leaves. It was not yet raining. It was about to. The wind was almost still. The dark grey clouds descended to just above the buildings, announcing the imminent coming of a heavy shower. I thought it was twined on the branches and was about to leave the place and forget the balloon, then the bright orange balloon suddenly floated again. It lifted higher and higher, above the tree crown, into the sky. I asked my friend if an ordinary kind of balloon could float and she did not say a word. I watched the bright orange balloon flying unhurriedly across the gloomy sky and was reminded of myself flying in dreams. The balloon must be enjoying its time in the sky. It was alive, exploring its unknown destination! I watched it fly away until it disappeared behind a building. Whether it was a helium balloon or an ordinary kind of balloon, or even something more than a balloon, remains mysterious forever.

When I watched the balloon fly, my friend laughed at my weird attention to the balloon. I did not explain to her how amazing it was to witness a bright orange balloon flying across a gloomy sky. In my dreams, I flew like the bright orange balloon. I remember at first I got to wear a pair of huge feathered wings. I stuffed my arms into the wings. They were very heavy. There were some other people doing the same thing with me and there was a coach. The coach taught us to flap the wings like birds. I flapped and flapped and flapped and I could only lift myself up for several feet. These annoyed birdmen, including me, were like chickens locked up in cages. They flapped and screamed and fell. I could not watch until if they succeeded at last. I was dragged out from this scene and thrown to a new

one in which I got rid of the huge feathered wings and swam in breaststroke in the sky. I extended my arms and legs and pushed on the air to move forward. Far fewer people were with me this time. We swam through some clouds. My sight was blurred. The group turned its direction and I struggled to follow. I was not sure whether I should wave my left arm harder to turn left or the right arm would push me to the left. I yelled to the group that I was falling behind until they finally disappeared in the clouds. The scene changed again. On a gloomy and drizzly day, I sat on the air with ease and comfort. Wind blew beside me, to one direction and another, which just did not bother me. I passed by some buildings, looked into the windows and saw people preparing dinner, watching TV and whatsoever. So many tiny people in one building — and I was in the sky wandering alone. What laid in front of me — the clouds, the mountains, the sea, opened their arms for me, embraced me; and I flew and flew and flew, to my unknown destination.

I enjoy my dreams a lot. The minute I wake up, I think hard, reconstruct my dreams and turn them into memories. My friends say I live in my own imaginary world too much. I cannot deny that because I sometimes forget if my memories are from dreams or reality. Sometimes things in my dreams are so impossible that I cannot believe them to be real, yet sometimes real life events appear in my dream and I am confused if my dreams are real. Sometimes I can even physically feel myself in dreams. Not only do I watch and act, I think and I decide my actions. I am a real person in my dreams! Now I lie in bed, stare at the white ceiling and my thoughts run wild. All of a sudden, a ring tone breaks this peaceful and quiet moment, and my thoughts are dragged back from my wonderland of dreams, to this real world. The phone shows “Mum.” I hesitate.

It has been a while since I last saw my mum. She was much older than what I remembered. A lot more wrinkles had conquered her face. When she looked at me, she seemed to always look through me — looking at me physically in this world but in her mind, she was looking at the younger me in her memories. Yes, I could tell from her eyes. She looked at me with doubt and uncertainty. I was sure sometimes she wondered who this soul was living in her daughter’s body. Our conversations always wound up about memories, the hardship she had had in raising me, her broken marriage, my



broken family, and money..... A woman, especially a mother, can repeat the same topic over and over until the conversation comes to the right time to end.

I pick up the phone.

“Hey sweetie, how have you been? You never call.” This is her usual opening.

“I’m good. I’m just busy.”

“Have you helped me consult the bank about my account? You know, it’s money. You should know how hard it is to earn each penny. You have been working for already several years. Don’t act like a child anymore fancying for whatever candies you like. Count your penny. Think about your future! Are you gonna live in your cage forever? I’m just speaking for your good! I can’t help with your life. You gotta work hard and live tough for yourself!”

“Sorry, I haven’t. I’ve been busy.”

“Do it soon. It’s money. Property prices have risen to a new high again. Girl, unlike other well-off parents, I can’t help you settle the down payment. Know your reality. I seriously worry about you. It’s really sad to see the homeless elderly. It says on the news young people cut down entertainments and travels and finally buy a flat. Can’t you just be more mature? Aye, I know these days are hard for you young people but you can only live with it right?”

“I know. I know.”

“Do take my words serious. Eat out less. You bought the stove and now you should use it more often. I told you not to buy an expensive one. What’s the point? You’re not living in a big fancy flat. The stove is already worth a month’s rent. How ridiculous! Aye, people say like mother, like daughter. Why can’t you learn from your mum!”

“The stove has a made-in-Germany assurance!” I argued.

“Will a made-in-China kill you? No! So what’s the matter of using a made-in-China! Know your reality! Buy only what you should buy. Only buy a made-in-Germany when one day you own a flat! Aye, I don’t want you to regret when you’re old. Seriously, face the reality. I’m gonna pick Lily up from school. Remember my words!”

She then hangs up.

Isn’t money meant for a better life? Why should I live if I could only survive?” I know these words are bullshit.

Lying on the bed, I am exhausted. She always throws me back to reality. I have been trying my best to survive. Every weekday morning, I compress myself to the tiniest possible bit in an overcrowded train compartment, and watch the people either doze off or stare at their phones. The train brings us across the Victoria Harbour, from the invisibly separated most northern-western land to the heart of Hong Kong. Silence flickers across in the compartment. I sometimes feel on my neck the inhalation and exhalation of another person standing right behind me, so heavy and hot. Every breath seems to use up its full energy in this moving cage where a breath of fresh air is rare and precious. I watch people in the train and they do not react. They either do not have the energy to notice or some just do not bother to care about my weird attention for them. Hong Kong people are very fashionable. I love to watch their styles of dressing. Japanese and Korean styles usually appear at the earlier stations of the North-west New Territories. In this season, navy-green over-sized jackets with tight jeans or long black tight cotton trousers are popular. Some like to wear a one-piece knee length plain dress with lace cutting which is more Japanese. More young elegant office ladies, who get on along the Tung Chung Line, say, Olympic and Kowloon stations, wear suits and they usually carry Michael Kors or Longchamp. I never see Chanel or Dior. Probably those who carry Chanel or Dior do not cram themselves onto a train in the morning? This is my only fun in an overcrowded train compartment in the early morning. Everyone here can do nothing except dozing off or staring at their phones. The silence of a crowd of more than a thousand people suffocates me. There is no way for me to break the silence. I am not a courageous idiot.

I stare at the ceiling. The ceiling is white. The four walls are also white. This is an 80-square foot subdivided flat, plainly renovated. I am lucky to at least have a bathroom, although it is only enough for a toilet bowl. Sometimes I sit on the toilet lid during shower when I feel too tired to stand. I am grateful that my landlord has replaced the filthy old toilet so that I can have a nice clean one to sit on, though it is a made-in-China.



I guess the quality of toilet bowls does not vary much between brands? Along the wall, there is a tiny sink, with an overhead cupboard, and the bathroom, separated from the room by a piece of glass. My landlord is so considerate that he used sandblasted glass for the bathroom; otherwise my friends would be too embarrassed to use the toilet. The bed is right opposite to the entrance door, along the window side. I am also grateful for having the windows, although they directly face the opposite flat and I have to draw the curtains all the time. Natural ventilation saves me a lot of money. Next to the bed, along the wall, are a small wardrobe and a table where I put my electric stove. The electric stove was so expensive that I had struggled for a week to make the decision. It is a German brand. Actually the Chinese brand is far cheaper but however cheap it is just still doesn't make it worth the price. Time has proved that it was a wise decision. It saves me a large sum of money from eating out, and probably saves my health. Beside the table, along another wall, is the entrance door, opposite to the bed. Between the entrance door and the bed, in the middle of the four walls, I have my little empty space. For most of the time I pile books, magazines and all sorts of things on the floor — however, when I clear the floor, I have a space to step on and stand.

This is the little space I have devoted my full effort to maintain. As a grown-up, I can only moan how childhood has died too soon and has left me alone here to suffer. I remember watching mum cook. It was usually around six something when the sun was about to set. By that time I had already watched TV for a while after school. Warm orange beams of the setting sun scattered in the dark living room. Mum usually only switched on the kitchen's light. The white light shone so brightly in the dim evening. The stove was right next to the entrance of the kitchen. I used to love leaning against the door and watching her flip the food in the wok. When the warm orange beams faded and total darkness flooded the quiet living room, I was standing by the hot stove under the bright white light, watching my mum cook for me. She sometimes asked me to go away because it was very hot in the kitchen. I just stood there anyway. The food sizzled in the wok and white fume swirled. She always urged me to eat first while she was cleaning up the kitchen. I usually could not resist the food and did not wait

for her because I was too hungry. Mum was lazy in cooking. She only made simple dishes, often repeatedly, so the smell of every ordinary evening was pretty similar; similar enough to accumulate to become one single smell which remains in my memory until now. Mum no longer cooks for me now. I have to cook for myself with my little German stove, at 8pm if I leave work on time, or for most of the time, 9pm. The smell of food diffuses into every corner of the room, which is not very pleasant. However, a grown-up cannot complain about how you feel uncomfortable with a smelly room. No one listens and cares.

Whatever happens to me stays inside these four white walls. On weekends when I do not go out, I am mute. Old memories entertain me. I remember during Christmas of my first year of work, I went to a club party with friends for the first time. We arrived too early at the venue — 11pm, not yet time for partying. A friend had her high heel cracked accidentally. When we finally got all the mess settled, it was just the right time to start partying. Everyone was served a drink at first. It was included in the ticket. I chose a glass of gin. The glass of gin was very bitter and spicy and I had to hold it all the time because we could not afford a table. This was a brilliant business idea — you were forced to walk around and meet different men and they would probably buy you another drink. I could not finish my gin and I left it at the bar table. The ambiguous dim white light heated up the space. Men and women could not see each other clearly. Only when someone stood in the random stronger white spotlight could you see his appearance. When you could not see and judge things sharply, everything was more mysteriously attractive. The dance pool was crowded with people shaking their bodies. Noisy disco music rocked everyone. Hands reached out from everywhere roaming over and touching my body. I was not myself anymore; I evaporated and diffused into the crowd of human bodies in the dim darkness. A boy, or a man, I could not tell, gradually approached me. He came closer and closer and finally there was no gap between us. I smelled the fragrance of washing powder. I took a deep breath and filled my nostrils and lungs with this fresh smell of washing powder. I touched his chest and I felt the warm, soft texture of a wool cardigan. It was probably reddish orange or light brown; I could not see clearly. He placed his arms



around my waist and I laid my head against his chest. This moment froze in my mind.

This has been too long ago. I leave my bed and go to the toilet. Sitting on the toilet I couldn't stop daydreaming again. If one day I invented something that shocked the world like Steve Jobs, I think I would owe it all to my toilet time. A huge blast astonishes me. A strong current push me forward and I hit on the wall. The toilet bowl cracks into pieces. I fall on the debris and I feel a momentary victory — my mother will now know a made-in-China can kill people. Pain starts to be transmitted from my nerves to the sensory part in my brain. Heat and thousands of sharp debris penetrated me. The heat burns my skin and the debris cuts open my flesh. People say there is a mechanism of losing consciousness when suffering from tremendous pain. However, I am more than conscious. I imagine blood flowing from my butt down to the toilet debris, to the bathroom floor and to the tiny floor space. My blood will soak the piles of books and magazines, wet the sockets and cause a short circuit. This is my little revenge for my dear landlord. His cheap made-in-China toilet bowl has killed a young life. Everyone will express their sympathy for me. The rent of this sub-divided flat and the ones nearby will drop frantically. I am proud of my death. My flesh is finally ripped apart now. I feel my soul so light, so light that I can float in the air. I am free now.



## What a Wonderful World

by Chloe YEUNG

Now I see the whole world under my eyes, with my most beloved Eurasian Magpie by my side.

“7 o’clock? Already?” I took a glance at the time on the alarm clock. Unwilling to wake up, I waited for a few more seconds before stopping the alarm. Another regular morning. It’s always frustrating to start a long day. I couldn’t remember how I felt hopeful and happy waking up as a kid. In primary school, I learnt the saying “A new day, a new beginning”, and somehow I felt excited about this expression. I decided to make it my motto. I had kept saying this for several years. Now, at the start of every day, it’s only unwillingness, reluctance, confusion and stress. Sometimes, I fretted so much from the notion that there are still thousands of days, decades of years ahead of me. I mean, life is hard, and it’s harder because it’s so long.

Like yesterday, and the day before yesterday, and every single weekday, I am walking the same route to school, on my own. Walking alone is a concept that I have accepted but I never like. The days when my mom held my hand and led my way is long gone. I need to be mature and walk my own path. The route from home to school takes 20 minutes, but it feels shorter than 20 minutes because loads of thoughts occupy and go through my mind during this time.

Will today’s vocabulary quiz be difficult? What if I fail it again? Last time I used a whole week to get over it... Shall I recite the words now once more, in case any of them slipped away from my mind during sleep? Wait, it’s Thursday! Is Mrs Lauten having the oral practice today? Last time she didn’t call on me... can there be a possibility of me getting serious stomachache during English lesson? God, last week I prayed for stopping my stomachache, this time I pray for having it. I don’t want to recall the pain of last week’s stomachache, maybe I am putting too much pressure on myself... Today my mum didn’t make me a lunchbox... I hope Jessie

and Joyce would remember to ask me to go out with them. But they would probably discuss that topic again, the one on graduation and university. Gosh, I have no idea what I am going to do with my life, I won’t be able to make any contributive response... But then I don’t want to eat alone either...

Unwillingness, reluctance, confusion and stress.

Endless thoughts that don’t actually have any conclusion appear, disappear, reappear, and re-reappear in my head. Then suddenly, the school is there in front of me.

“Beep...beep...”

I am standing under a traffic light, waiting to cross the road. Once the green pedestrian sign lights up I will cross the street and arrive at school’s front gate. Even from a distance, I can spot it — it instantly catches my attention and draws me from my chaotic thoughts — an Eurasian Magpie, standing on top of school’s rusted metallic gate.

Why do I love this specie of bird so much? The first time I saw it I was in kindergarten — a dark little bird with a gloss of bluish gradient on the bottom part of its wings. And when the bird spreads its wings, it reveals the pearl white inner webs on them. Its tail is long and dispersed in the shape of an umbrella. Splendid. It was flying and gliding in the sky. It was such a pleasure to watch it dance. I wonder what it feels to be a magpie. I think it would feel free and unconstrained. I remember it’s appearance so well that the other day, when the television was broadcasting an animal programme, I immediately spotted it and learnt its name — Eurasian Magpie. M-A-G-P-I-E, as the syllables of this word hit my ears, a sense of closeness struck me — my name is Maisie.

Having a favourite animal somehow made me feel special. I was special, and was the centre of attention when I was small. I loved wearing long fluffy dress. Pink was my favourite, the skirt of them swirled and leaped with me when I ran. Homework, academics, were not a problem at that time. There was only one type of homework — copybook — scribble an “A” thirty times then it was done. Every day after school, I finished my homework within an hour and played with my friends in the playground in my estate. We role-played in there, if we wanted the playground to be



a castle, then I would always be the princess. If it was a royal family, then I would play the attractive, amiable big daughter. If it were a clinic, then I would always be the experienced doctor, never the patient. My family brought me out for a day trip every weekend. I loved vehicles that had three seats in a row, so that we could sit together. Mom and dad were always around me.

It seems a bit unreal now when I look back. The image is always a carefree, energetic, resplendent girl running and spinning around, and sunlight is often strong and flaring, accompanied by echoes of laughter and joy, with two adults by her side. I felt more important in the past. Not that I think my parents don't care for me now, but as I grow older, I get the sense that I am, in fact, so ordinary and indistinctive that Jessie and Joyce can eat without me. Every day, I go home after school and do the homework in my room; no one asks me out; no one invites me to the playground. I am not the princess anymore. I am just Maisie, a 14-year-old girl who walks to school on her own.

Before I knew it, the magpie has already flown away from the metallic gate. A student with my school uniform comes to my right and stops, with his head down. I turn to take a clearer look at him. He is staring at a textbook, his mouth muttering. A second later, he takes a quick breath and looks up, pressing the book against his chest, and mutters words. Ah! I already feel the stress even by looking at him. Wait, isn't this Gavin? Why is he revising History so soon? Our test is next week! He cannot be studying one week ahead of the test, he is not that type of student. This is really freaking me out. Is it my problem? Is the History test today? I become extremely frightened. I immediately search for the scenes related to this test amidst the fragmented, unorganized memories in my mind. The "Beep... beep" of the traffic light gradually fades out.

Then there comes a blurry voice in my head. "Class, I discovered that 22th this month is the teacher-development day, so, that day's History test will be rescheduled to a week before it, that is, 15th Thursday. Please mark this down on your handbook. Anyone missed that? Keep in mind that this test goes to 50% of grade of the subject, do treat it seriously..." As soon as the sentence finishes itself, my stomach starts churning, all my skin hair

stands straight, and every inch of my skin feels like being pricked. I can't relax at all.

I am screwed. How can I have forgotten this completely? I have always thought that the test is in next week. How can this happen? How did this entire phrase just disappear from my mind? I have heard it and stored it somewhere in my mind, why the hell did I not know the test is today? And what do I do now? Should I fake stomachache and get a sick leave? But Ms Chan won't let me take the exam again, she will say it's not fair to the others. Then I will get zero mark for this test. No, it doesn't work. So I'll just stride into the classroom and have the exam today? With NO preparation and revision? I have never not studied for a test. This is so scary. I am frightened. What about cheating? If I cheat I can secure my grade... But what if I get caught? And I have never cheated too. I dismiss this thought immediately, I will not cheat. But I am so screwed, I'm done.

I subconsciously turn my head to the left, avoiding having eye-contact with Gavin, I can't face this. What is wrong with you, Maisie? Last Tuesday, you forgot to bring your calculator for the Maths quiz. Yesterday, you didn't bring your sport uniform for the PE lesson. Now, it is the History test that goes to 50% of the subject's assessment? Why are you going to school? Do you even know where you are? Is your brain left in your bed? If beating myself can wake me up from my foolishness, I want to punch myself right in the face. I hate this Maisie.

Every now and then Jessie and Joyce talk about going to university. I have done my part as a student. If I knew that today's the History test I would definitely have studied for it. I am not lazy. I never cheat during exams, but what can I do with my carelessness? I am never good. I don't see myself entering university after three years. It's ridiculous for people like me even to dream about it.

What would kid-Maisie think if she knew that she would grow up to be a great failure? She was a happy, carefree little princess back then. In the bright sunshine, the little princess yelled 'Mum, watch this!' and slid down the slide, only to find herself alone in the middle of nowhere, her life now is nothing brilliant, nothing to worth looking forward to. She's a confused and insignificant human being. A sense of guilt and remorse comes to me when



I picture my happy self in the childhood. I cannot face her. Look at me now, I am such a failure, such a piece of human garbage.

I am a burden to mom and dad too, ain't I? For a long time, I haven't seen them happy because of me, like they did in the old days. They laughed, truly happily, over small things that I did, such as when I was putting on mom's lipstick, or trying to walk in her heels. And when I imitated the song "What a Wonderful World" on the radio and sang it, they laughed and clapped hands for me. As my parents, they gave me everything, provided me with the best living conditions at the expense of time, money, etc... Now I will grow up to be unemployed because I won't get into a university, and I could never pay off their cost, and their expectation.

One late night, when they thought I had slept, I heard them discussing me. Mum was worried about my academics. She said my rank in class was getting worse, and asked Dad what could be done to help with this. Dad sighed, saying that he had no solution either. At last he told mum that things would get better. Then, my mum went washing dishes in the kitchen. As my dad walked past my room, he liberated a long deep sigh. I am a burden. I don't deserve their money and time, and their love.

Life is long, I am just fourteen. How long do I still have to suffer? For an instance, I think, maybe everything can just...end here, I don't have to go on with this unsuccessful life and carry with me all the expectations from kid-Maggie and my parents anymore.

"Beep...beep..."

I realize that Gavin is not next to me now. I have stood here for some time already. So I step forward and walk towards the school's gate.

It's too late already when I notice the red pedestrian sign is lit. On the crossroad to my right, a silver, midsize car is running towards me, and its' speed is too fast to capture, too swift to dodge. And it crashes me against my pelvis. The shock transmits up my spine and to every part of my body. My bones and muscles are crumbling and being smashed together. I hear the screech of the car's brake and the echoes that follow. In no time, I am flying through air, then drop back onto the ground. My head is facing the

sky, I have lost sense and cannot move.

Feels like hours have past, my consciousness is lost. I'm not thinking, nor am I feeling anything. When I come to myself again, I am given no time to make sense of the situation.

Then, all of a sudden, everything becomes very light, my back cannot feel the roughness of the ground — I am departing from my body, drifting and floating up in the air. I don't know whether I am dead yet. Now I have drifted around 3 metres away from my body, a breeze flips me over and I get to take a look at myself. My body is lying on the road, facing upwards, with my limbs sprawling out. Blood keeps flowing out from the body. A man comes out of his grey, midsize car and immediately runs towards my body. He puts his shaking hands towards my face and under my nostrils to check my breath. His eyes widen, his mouth wide open and gasped for air. He falls on the ground and his body keeps shivering.

I am dead.

Although I am thinking about death before the car crashes me, I can't believe what is happening. "Let me finish the History test. Let me do the vocab quiz. Mom is waiting for me at home... I can't die yet..." I scream, but no sound is made. I strive my hardest energy to pull the force out of my light spirit and to rush towards my body...but I can't. I am screaming and flailing with all my willpower but there is not a sound or a move that I can make. This is it. I just keep ascending upwards gradually. I am crying and repenting internally, watching my body. And everything around the place were getting smaller and smaller.

Then a police car arrives. More people come encircling the crossroad. The police takes out a tent and covers my body with it. My school teachers come forward and help with the investigation. They look shocked and upset. Students who see this scream and cry... All these seem to me a movie scene, like I am watching a footage. I am watching, and not living in the world anymore. I am not able to bring about a slightest change. I have stopped flailing because I know it won't work.

People's heads and everything are gradually getting smaller, and more of the landscape is showing in my vision. It's the way a bird sees the



world, an Eurasian Magpie sees the world. From so high up, school and other buildings seem to be blocks of legos fixed gently on Earth. I recognize the road that I go to school. Around its curves and turns are blends of green trees and leaves. I have never looked at the road this way. I didn't know that it actually looks quite fascinating. Different roads meet and form into a web on the scape. Cars of various sizes slide through the roads in different directions...My school looks smaller than my thumb, and soon, it diminishes to just a small spot. I can't look inside the classroom. I don't see Ms Chan distributing the History paper, nor do I see Jessie and Joyce chatting. I also don't see Ms Lauten calling on my classmates for the oral practice...The things that I have worried, and have imagined a thousand times become so meaningless in this moment.

People are tiny squirming dots on the landscape. They are so little, really. But they add vitality and energy to the picture. Small but important. A strand of cloud shifts below me. A breeze softly passes through me. Its "Shh..." sound pats my ears as it passes. After it goes through, the serenity and peace in the middle of sky is recovered. Occasionally, I still hear people's voices, and the engine of cars. Or I don't. I might just be thinking that I have heard them. The sight under my eyes is picturesque.

The world has never been more enchanting. And the more I realise this, the more I repent.

The world is so beautiful. How precious and blessed I was to be born as a human, and have the capability to admire Earth's beauty...How foolish I was to hate my life. How ignorant I was to think that I was alone, in the company of the world's beauty and vitality? All my life, I have focused on the tiny things that I don't have, and forgotten the big things that I have. I don't remember a single word I recited for my vocabulary quiz, or when was the year that Japan surrendered in history. But then the trees and flowers they didn't need to recite a word to grow and blossom.

I suddenly understand — every creature is born beautiful, the flowers, the leaves, and those tiny squirming dots. They just don't know that themselves. I have seen the world with my eyes hooded. In the picture beneath my eyes, people walk and stop to take a break. They meet their friends and wave hands. They trip over and stand back up. A mum gets angry

because her son plays with mud. She sweeps the dirt off with tissue paper and smiles again when she looks at her mischievous boy. Two school girls hear the school bell and run to school. Life is such magical and magnificent thing. Why haven't I known this earlier? Why haven't I looked at the world in this selfless way and appreciated the beauty of life?

I am thinking about Mum and Dad. The thought that they receive the call from the police, rush to the hospital only to find that their daughter has passed away, then they cry and scream...it breaks my heart.

An Eurasian Magpie flies from the behind. Is it sent from god? This heavenly scene reminds me that my ending is near. I close my eyes, and imagine my mum and dad beside me. I want to tell them that at this moment I feel so grateful for having the chance to be their daughter. I want to tell them that I have had the best childhood. I want to tell them "Don't feel sad, for now I have realised the true meaning of my life". I open my eyes, and try to capture as much beauty as I can before I leave.

I finally understand the secret of Eurasian Magpie, why it is so free and why I adore it so much. To be born with wings, and to be able to view the world from above, it has long ago learnt the truth about the world. If only I had learnt to see things with a magpie's point of view ...

A song sweeps in and fills the surroundings ...

*I see trees of green, red roses too  
I see them bloom for me and you  
And I think to myself what a wonderful world.*

*I see skies of blue and clouds of white  
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night...*

Now I see the whole world under my eyes, with my most beloved Eurasian Magpie by my side. Tears come falling from the gratitude, and my heart aches, with the splendour of the world.

*And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world.*



# Until it Turns Golden

by Nelly YIM

## I.

She sat close to the fire and pierced a loaf of bread with the barbecue fork. The two long teeth of the fork punched in through the poles and secured the white bread. She watched the bread closely, making sure that it kept an optimal distance from the fire. Soon the soft white bread will turn hard. If you wait a little longer, it will turn yellowish, golden, and then brown. Remember to flip the fork to another side and wait until the golden crust forms. Don't let either side get over-burnt.

She remembered that she once put a loaf of bread into a toaster — not the kind where the bread popped up automatically, but the kind that looked like a mini oven. She forgot to take the bread out until the next day. She was surprised at seeing the golden color preserved on the toast but when she touched it, it was as hard and light as a foam board.

She kept toasting bread on the fire because it was the easiest food to make during a barbecue. She sometimes dreaded the thought of barbecuing meat because it was often raw even though she believed it was cooked. After toasting a pile of bread for the children, she opened a bag of marshmallows.

The bag of Rocky Mountain marshmallows smelt like a baby's room — soft white bunnies, creamy colored pillows, and aromatic vanilla lotion. Babies were cute, innocent, and vulnerable. She had always thought this way, until she had her own babies. The first baby was a born artist. She doodled things using her fingers as brush, and saliva, milk or juice as paint. The second baby, two years after the first one, made use of every hour of her mum's time after work to cry, to destroy, and to fight. Instead of roasting the marshmallows, she took two and ate them.

She looked at the barbecue set on the table. There were still some fish balls, chicken wings, pork chops, and beef pieces left. Not wanting to waste the food although the children had filled up their stomach already, she skewered some chicken wings with the barbecue fork.

She had to wait even longer this time. She had to observe the color

of the chicken wings and turn the fork from time to time. If you miss half a second, the skin of the wings will turn black and would be too unpleasant to be put in your mouth. She found it difficult to roast them because the inside might still be uncooked even if they looked ready on the outside. If only the meat could be roasted just as easy as the white bread.

Paper plates, plastic forks and wooden chopsticks were everywhere on the benches, on the table, and on the floor. The mess was worse than the toys that her children scattered on the floor. The toys, at least, did not exude any smell, was not sticky, and would not be blown away by the wind. Oh, but the honey. The honey that dripped onto her shoe and her bag. Or, it simply stuck on her fingers and her jeans.

She hated it when she was sweating but she still had to stay patient and talk with other mums while also watching out in case the food got over-burnt. Her hair and skin and T-shirt would all absorb the smell of the barbecued pork and heavily-seasoned beef and the pungent smoky or burnt smell. She would have to wash all her clothes and take a long shower after leaving the park. She would have to ask her children to do so, too. Even if they had to go to school early the next day, she would not allow them to go to bed with traces of barbecue.

She had this barbecue day with other families on a Sunday afternoon. It was organized by the school. Feeling guilty that she did not always participate in the Parent-Teacher Association activities or volunteer at school events, she joined this kind of outing occasionally, so as to catch up with other mums about parenting and schooling tips.

If there were no gathering with relatives or other parents, Sunday afternoon would be particularly lethargic. After eating the leftover they usually brought home after Saturday's meal at a restaurant, her children would play together. After spending some time with them until they became more and more energetic whereas her energy was consumed, she would sit on the sofa with a novel in her hand, fantasizing about life otherwise.

"Wake up, mum!"

"You promised to take me out."

"I want to go out. I want to go out."

"It's nearly four..."



“It’s five already...”

She knew her youngest child was saying these over and over again. She did not know exactly how she responded, because she was immersed in her dream. In order not to let the children down, she asked her husband to take them out instead. When the same thing happened on a number of Sundays, the children seemed not to believe her anymore when she said she would take them out “the next time”.

“Why don’t you quit your job and stay at home to take care of your children?”

“Who takes care of them?” Friends and colleagues often asked. She loved working more than doing household chores. She loved her children but she found it unnecessary to perform the duties of cooking and washing and then waiting for them to come back home. She was not like her mother, who stayed at home for her the whole life and took great care of her family and cooked every meal for them. She preferred nurturing her children in a more intellectual way.

Her mother had seven children in total, and died at the age of 85. At her mother’s funeral, Mei burned paper offerings and paper money the whole night. The fire was easily attached to the paper. A tinge of red and grey was formed on the rim of the paper money, and soon it devoured the whole piece. The piece of paper was melted into grey feathers. Some of the feathers would fly away when the fire tongues got close.

These grey feathers would never erase the memory of how her mother blamed her. Her mother always came to her house without her knowing it. Sometimes, she would come with different soup ingredients and instruct Marianna to boil soup for the family. Sometimes, she would come and play with the children. Sometimes, she would just sit and wait for her and then give a sermon on how to clean the house properly and prepare nutritious food for the children and her husband. Mei knew that her mother wanted her to be a traditional housewife. But how could she? She wanted to have her own life, her own circle of friends who might or might not be mothers, her own place to show her potentials, her own money to save up and buy things she liked. And when inflation became so high and uncontrollable in society, she wanted to ensure that her children had sufficient resources

and quality education. Who cared about the one or two dishes of wok-fried pork? When Marianna was on holiday, she would cook a pot of vegetables or steamed fish. The food would get done themselves by the time the water was boiled. That was quick and almost effortless, so she could better spend the time on going through her children’s schoolwork or planning extra lessons for them or watching the television together.

The fatigue she had from carrying each of them inside her for months did not deter her from hoping for having children. Although the sweet marshmallow-like babies turned out not as sweet and lovely as she thought, there was joy in raising them. Whenever she saw their big smile when they had accomplished small tasks such as dressing up the teddy or tidying up their desk neatly, her heart would melt. She was proud of their achievement at school, because their results were usually the top. If they weren’t, she would push them to do supplementary exercises and attend tutorial classes. She was also proud of how her children had inherited the genes: the eldest child’s eyes and mouth resembled her husband’s; the second child’s nose and eyebrows looked exactly like hers; and the third child had her smile but her husband’s frown.

She did not really like the idea of barbecue, because sitting close to the fire and waiting for the food to get done was such a waste of time in her opinion.

“Is it ready yet?”

“Just wait a bit longer.”

“But it has been there for a long time!”

“Maybe a few more minutes.”

“Look! It has turned golden color already! I’m hungry!”

The inside is still raw. Go and play!”

She wasn’t sure herself.

She could never estimate whether the food was ready from its look. Even if it was charred and perfectly gold with a luring smell, it might be raw inside. She wasn’t sure when to tell it was ready, when to remove the food from the barbecue fork and give it a try.

The children had been playing in the open space long enough for them to feel hungry and come back for food. Her younger daughter ran to



the barbecue fire and said, “I’m hungry, mama.” Thinking that she had sat long enough for the pork chop to be roasted well, she gave her the juicy golden piece of meat. Her daughter seemed to be amazed by the beautifully roasted pork and took quick bites.

“Is it yummy?”

“Yes! It smells so good.”

She felt that she had accomplished a task, a small but significant one — not only because she could finally master the skill of barbecuing a tasty piece of meat, but also because she was able to cook well for her child, just like other stay-home mums.

## II.

She sits close to the fire and pierces a loaf of bread with the barbecue fork. Usually people eat other barbecue food like meatballs, sausages, and beef, pork and chicken wings first, instead of bread and marshmallows. But she loves the simple color and smell of the bread, and the easy yet delicious way of toasting it.

She used to love eating the honey-scented and golden-seared chicken wings and pork slices. But now, having a son of her own, she is more careful with the nutritional values of food. The oil and grease from the roasted meat is unpleasant. The seasoning is too heavy, which means that the meat itself is probably frozen for so long that the taste has gone and people can do nothing about it except putting on different sauces and condiments.

Barbecue food is often not fresh and healthy. It could even release chemicals that could cause cancer. She would not allow her son to eat roasted meat or processed meat too often. But it is an Outdoor Activities Day with other schoolmates and parents. Of course, the “outdoor activities” for adults are largely limited to barbecuing under the blazing sun because kids will not have the patience to sit still for more than five minutes, especially when it is a non-school day and there is a large open space nearby to run and play on.

She remembers that more than two decades ago, she also joined an Outdoor Activities Day. Her mother went with her and her sister, and had a barbecue together with other classmates and parents. She was running

around in the park, and when she came back to the barbecue fire, her mother gave her a scrumptious and meaty pork chop. The honey and oil, fresh and golden and shiny, almost reflected the clouds in the sky. When she took several bites, she found that the inside was still raw. She wanted to ask her mother to roast it again, but she did not want to disappoint her.

As a kid, she was fascinated by the wonderful food that her friends’ mum could make. Cherry, her best friend, invited her to her tenth birthday party at her house. Cherry’s mother prepared yummy cakes for tea and a table of dishes for dinner. It seemed that Cherry regarded this as a usual thing — to have the right to enjoy what her mother prepared for her. It was also a natural and normal thing for her mother to be good at cooking and setting up a nice living environment for the family.

In the first few years of her marriage, her husband would blame her for not doing the housework well enough or for doing it clumsily.

“There are still some streaks of hair near the sofa!”

“The utensils should be put this way so that our son won’t get them easily.”

She felt a bit helpless. No one had trained her for doing any kind of housework before. She had little knowledge of how to tidy things up properly. She was not a careful person, not observant enough to know what was wrong from minor details. It was because Marianna took care of all the chores when she was small, and her mother did not expect her to learn doing any housework. Therefore, she began to try her best to take care of the family when she had her own.

She always considered that her mother’s care for the family was not enough. She seldom felt that her mother put in any effort other than buying them toys or food or urging them to study. Although she had spent time with her and her sister, a lot of time would be spent on asking about schoolwork or telling them to study well. She knew that her mother was proud of her, because she got excellent results. As her mother worked in a publishing house, books were often her companion since she was small. Her mother also taught her history, geography, and science. She was also proud of having an intelligent mother who taught her interesting facts and read her books. However, whenever she went to her friends’ house or whenever her



friends opened their lunchboxes, she would feel a bit envious. She did not understand why all her friends' mums knew how to sew and decorate and bake but her mother did not.

After retirement, her mother tried to take up the housework, but it was a bit too late for one to master all these tasks at this age. Still, her mother started learning to do all the chores, and would then mumble, "Oh...housewives are so great. They are even more capable than working mothers!"

However, her mother got more and more forgetful. At first it was just her glasses. At times, she would forget to put the leftover into the fridge, take the food out from the oven, or turn the tap off after washing the dishes. There were also a number of times when she left the kettle boiling and went out to the market. The kettle was burnt black when she came home. Luckily, no one was hurt and nothing was damaged except the poor little kettle.

They soon agreed to hire a domestic helper to help out at her parents' place, to take care of them and also the big flat which once accommodated a family of four. She herself, after getting married, did not want to hire one because their flat, though not cheap, is too small to allow one more person. As her son was still small, she even had to give up her full-time job at the government but to work part-time in a café. Her full time job has become domestic.

She thinks of her parents at home, and how she has to go to their flat to make sure they are doing well, to buy some food which the new maid doesn't know where to get. She wants to spend time with them. But with a family of her own, she needs to try hard to squeeze time so that she can find time to stay with her parents.

Now, it is her mother who gives sermons to her. Whenever they have time to meet, their conversation would be,

"You should not waste your years of education! Go find a job again and let us take care of Joe."

"No, you two have worked for so many years and should enjoy your life now. Besides, you are always forgetting this and that!"

"Well then, our maid can help take care of him."

"No, she is too new to everything in Hong Kong, and Joe is too small

to be taken care of by a stranger."

"But you have studied for so many years and it's a waste if you don't contribute."

"Mum, I understand. I worked for the government for some years so as to contribute. But with Joe now, I just can't take up a full time job again."

"You see, everything is becoming very expensive nowadays. Only your husband's salary and the little amount of money you earn from your part time job aren't enough."

"Yes, but I really need to take good care of Joe at this stage."

"But your years of education can guarantee you a good job, and you will have more money to take good care of him. Schooling, extra-curricular activities, estate prices, all cost a lot!"

"Let us take care of him, don't worry."

"Mum..."

It goes on and on, circulating endlessly.

She has always imagined that if her mother had been born several centuries ago, she would have been a woman who dared to leave her family and start an adventure. Her mother would not allow herself to sit and wait for the food to turn golden, or to call upon her children to eat the barbecued pork and meatballs. Her mother might not have become a heroine, but she would never have been a cook to her family. But she, herself, wants to become a responsible mother, a mother who is capable of taking care of the family other than earning money back.

Her son will be back with his friends soon, and they will love to eat some roasted marshmallows and bread. Roasting marshmallows and bread are of course easy because you can see whether it is ready or not from its look. They are either not golden enough because they are too far from the fire and there is little time for them to warm up; or too burnt because one does not pay attention and forgets to turn the barbecue fork from time to time. But she also has to barbecue processed and seasoned meat pieces because they are commonly eaten during barbecues. Roasting meat is now an easy job for her, because of her continuous effort in cooking and preparing meals for her husband and son all these years at home.

Sitting close to the fire, she stays patient and observant until the food



is cooked and turns golden so that her child can enjoy the food after playing all day.





## The Rubber Gloves

by Tinkam YIP

I'm in my room that is not my own. I open the drawer to check my gloves. This is a pair of pink rubber gloves my first employers gave me. I like to have a look at the dull-green stains on it before I go to sleep, before the next day of tedious work. They're not new anymore. Worn-away at the fingers, they now resemble my actual fingers. I like to feel the friction by rubbing my fingers over it, the hardships I must struggle through in life. Now and then I think of them, my Ma'am and Sir — although that's in fact how I call everyone now.

It was my first job in Hong Kong. I was a high-school graduate in the Philippines, an outstanding student. I wasn't born in a wealthy family. So naturally, my little brother went to a college instead of me and I came to Hong Kong to work and pay for his tuition fee. But that was what a sister should do, wasn't it? Mother was right. A high-school graduate gets better paid in Hong Kong than in Tandag. I came right after I turned twenty-five. Like most of us, I was registered at an agency and trained afterwards. They said I was smart. I was fast with everything in the training centre and I always managed to make people laugh when they were too bored to go on practising the skills and languages. The funny thing is that "ma'am" sounded exactly like "mom" to me. They couldn't help laughing when I told them we were going to call our employers "mom". After all the standard procedures I finally found a family that was willing to take me. I still remember the day they signed the contract with me. They said they appreciated it very much because other helpers wouldn't take the job. I was as glad as they were, because they were the first people who wanted me. I was new after all.

Ma'am was a charming woman who always wore a smile on her face and never hurt anyone's feelings. In my country, a mother is "ilaw ng tahanan", the light of the house. I'm sure if the situation hadn't been so critical, she wouldn't have chosen to work and to pay for someone like me to take care of the house. But if she hadn't, I wouldn't have the chance to get to know them. I got on with her very well. Sir was kind to me too, though

he always wore a stern look with lines crinkled up between his eyebrows. I was constantly worried if I did something wrong at the beginning but then I realised he was frowning at something else, or he basically frowned at everything. He let me have dinner with them, sitting around the same table like a family. I learnt their daily routine and remembered every habit this family had: Ma'am calling in at 8:30am and 3:30pm every day to check whether I took Jim to and from school safely; no red meat but only fish in diet; barefoot in the house. They said I was clever, unlike the others. But they didn't know I was also used to taking care of others; just not everyone I took care of would show any gratitude as they did. However, my friends who had worked in Hong Kong for a while said my employers were just averagely-good people, like most employers we'd meet. And they wouldn't take the job to take care of a sick kid anyway. Too much responsibility, they said. But I thought my Ma'am and Sir were more than average. They were unique to me. And I didn't mind the responsibility.

All the things you can name in the house were my responsibilities, including little Jim. Jim was a cute and talkative boy with a quick mind and a weak heart. Due to his heart problem — I didn't know how but it was — he threw up all the time. And I was responsible for cleaning up his greenish-yellow vomit and wiping the floor after giving him his medicine. It was truly not a very desirable job at the beginning but I got used to it and took it as what I should do. Jim was the one who suffered the most after all. He was always apologetic about the trouble he caused. How could you possibly have any grievance against such a boy? The thing I enjoyed was helping with his homework. Ma'am and Sir said I helped a lot. Jim was hard-working and I tutored him with his maths and English because they spent most of their money on Jim's sickness and couldn't afford a private tutor; and for the same reason, I could only sleep in the same room with Jim and have an area just enough for a bunk bed and a drawer to store my stuff. We used to have little chats before we slept, talking through the little thin board that set our sides. He'd tell me about how school was. He told me he was always at the front of the queue because he wasn't as tall as the others. He talked about his vomiting at school and everyone's looks at him. But he only talked, never complained. He recited to me the Lord's Prayer and the



nine fruits of the Spirit that he had to recite every day during the morning assembly. Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. Self-control.

“Why self-control?” I asked him.

“Because once you can control yourself you never put anybody off, like, if I can control my sickness, I guess I’d be less a trouble to the others and the mature red fruit would grow inside me.”

He didn’t know what really was growing inside him. There wasn’t even a strong red heart. And a fruit isn’t necessarily red either. It could be dull and green, like the rotten food lurking somewhere in his stomach. But what did I know back then? I was as ignorant and innocent as he was; and my fruit was unripe, but growing.

I have my own room now. My employers are rich and they give me a lot of free time. I’m even allowed to go to bed after finishing all the housework, even though they’re still outside in the living room. I put on my pink gloves to see if they still fit. They still fit. They always fit. They’re designed to be a little oversized to fit anybody’s hands. They’re rough on both outside and inside, lest they might slip off my hands while I do housework.

I got allergic or something. Ma’am found my fingers full of red and rough patches and I couldn’t help scratching my hands so much that they bled. She was very concerned and asked me if I was okay to work. I said I was okay and the next day in the morning, I found a pair of rubber gloves the colour of peaches in the kitchen and a glass of ointment with a note stuck on it:

*Don’t get hurt for the washings.*

*We’ll get new ones when they need replacement.*

*Madam*

I still feel the lurch my heart gave when I saw those words. I was a clever student in school, a good daughter in my family. People appreciated me but it was the first time I felt valued. The first time I felt important.

Utang na loob, “a debt of my inner self”. But I know as I sit on my bed with my old gloves on that I never can pay it off; or it wasn’t really a debt all along. I thanked Ma’am when she came back after work. She said I could dry the gloves after use every day and put them in the drawer at night. So I did it with care.

I grew to love Jim as a brother. I liked it when he called me “JeJe”, which means sister in their language. I learnt how to steam fish for them. I secretly wiped the windows for them even though the law prohibited them to let me do this. I got money from the bank every month, went to the exchange store, converted it to pesos, the exact amount of an instalment of my little brother’s tuition fee plus 5,000 pesos. I put the cash in an envelope and posted it to my address, my home address. But soon I found out how to make an automatic transfer and I never had to write my address again. But I still needed to go to the bank now and then, for the family I served. Sir did some business and had a lot of cheques to be deposited. I have to admit it felt good, being trusted, with something as important as money.

Ma’am smiled at me every time she passed by when I was sweeping the floor, taking the clothes to wash, or just walking in the house. But then I noticed that she frowned, like what Sir did. There were a few times I wanted to ask her what happened. I thought I had to know what was happening; or at least to frown with them, no matter what for. The family was acting weird but they were still nice to me. They asked me several times if I wanted to get a new pair of gloves or needed anything else. One windy night everything became clear. I was in the kitchen, washing the dishes after dinner when my Ma’am screamed. I dashed to the living room and saw Jim lying on Ma’am’s lap and Sir phoning the ambulance. I panicked so much and I felt that I had to do something. I reached my hand to Jim to feel his chest but was stopped by Ma’am.

“For God’s sake. Your gloves are dirty!”

Shocked by Ma’am’s anger — she never shouted at me — I hastened to draw my hand back and realised for the first time my dripping gloves were stained with dots of dull-green dirt. The ambulance came very fast and they went with Jim, leaving me standing there rooted like some kind of houseware.



Ma'am said sorry to me when she came back. I wanted to help them tidy up Jim's room, which was my room. But it wasn't mine, not anymore. After three days of silence in the house Sir told me he had notified the Immigration Department already. I should go. Sir gave me an air ticket to the Philippines. He then searched his pocket and took out a chequebook.

"Maybe I write you a cash cheque. That saves the effort," Sir said, frowning at the chequebook.

"Pack your things, no rush," Ma'am said, wearing a smile.

I took the cheque that was worth two months of my salary, a cheque without my name on it. I searched for words to reply but there wasn't any. I suddenly thought of my drawer and asked them if I could take the rubber gloves with me. Of course they let me. They were kind to me.

I wasn't at Jim's funeral. I didn't help to arrange it. I wasn't even in his country when he was sent to burn.

Now I look back on all these and I wonder why I would want to keep the gloves. Maybe I was scared of getting skin allergy again. Maybe I was just used to wearing them to work. But the thing about wearing rubber gloves to work is that you can't feel things, not really, almost like numbness. I move my fingers, feel the numbness for a while and then I take the gloves off and put them back into the drawer with care. It's time I should go to sleep. The only thing in my mind now is to work, get paid and send money back to my own family who seem as unreal as everyone to me now.



Poetry



## The Sweetest Tune

by Alissa de AQUINO CARLSSON

It cannot be seen but felt  
It does not ask, it tells  
It does not hide, it affects  
It is not an object, it is a being  
It does not judge, it comforts  
It does not shy away, it confronts  
It does not take away, it gives  
It does not fake, it is real  
It is the reason, I cannot stand still

## Moving

by Alissa de AQUINO CARLSSON

The girl glances out the open window  
The fear of loneliness creeps under her skin  
She cannot see it, the thing she is looking for  
Her surroundings are changing and deceiving  
As she comes closer, she is thrown to the ground  
Empty air is holding her down  
Why can she not see it?  
Her path is dark, creatures lurking  
Realization kicks her  
It is Fear that stops her  
It cannot be seen but felt  
The girl is afraid  
Afraid of not finding what it is she searches for  
Maybe she does not know  
The Fear of the unknown creeps  
It brings along Doubt  
Doubts beats the girl down  
She stared into the eyes of Doubt  
Deciding no longer will she be afraid  
She will not be beaten down by Doubt  
Though her path is uncertain, there is still a road  
A road to keep walking on, never stopping.



## Selfishness (10 Apr/ Monday / Rainy)

by AU Wing In, Jasmi

Red wine  
White fish  
Golden chicken  
Waiter is confident  
in receiving appreciation  
But waiter,  
I have ordered cake and black coffee  
No Madam,  
Because it's good for you

Black shoes  
White skirt  
Pink ribbon  
Mummy's smile with satisfaction  
But Mum,  
Can I have my blue dress  
back?  
No, my honey,  
Because it suits you

Red roses  
Brown bear  
Blue diamond  
His eyes fill with eagerness  
But my love,  
A simple ring and dinner will do  
No, sweetheart,  
Because I love you

Doll —  
She went home and hugged her doll  
That little blue dress doll  
She smiled  
The doll cried

## These are photographs of me II

by Sharda BIJLSMA

The truth is out,  
Evidence is clear.  
Still I do not want to hear.  
I wear my hands like earmuffs,  
To protect me from the cold,  
However, seasons will change  
And sooner rather than later,  
I will hear what has been told.



## Party Blues

by Daniela BRUNNER

Ring the bell, call everyone,  
Let the dogs out, let them bark very loud,  
Push the volume, let the music sound,  
Bring the alcohol, let the party people out!

Look in the sky, the aeroplanes left a vapor trail,  
Written on the sky: today you won't fail!  
Put your high heels on, your perfume smells good,  
Let everybody around you know that you are in a perfect mood.

There he was standing, it wasn't love at the first sight,  
At this moment, I didn't recognize that he could be my mister right,  
A macho, smart-arse and a bad clothing style,  
But his eyes turned me around and I forget why I didn't like him for  
a while.

Suddenly love was in the air, stars turned into hearts in the night,  
I could hug the moon and kiss the sun,  
My heart, big like the ocean, it feels so much love for him,  
Now is everything good, now life makes sense.

## Take Me Far Away

by Daniela BRUNNER

A unicorn is an animal with one horn,  
A wood in a fairytale, this is the place it was born,  
Wearing a beautiful white coat and wings to raise up high,  
It leaves a rainbow in the sky when it flies.

An imagination in many children's brain,  
Jumping on the horses back and fly far away when it starts to rain,  
It takes you to another place, when the recent one seems hopeless and sad,  
But in the end, the unicorn isn't real, it's a fake.



## Free Association

by CHAN Kam Chi

The shiny gold is so soft and malleable that  
Stress cannot force it apart.  
Rubber band as a friend of the metal, rigid and brittle,  
Has a completely different life.  
Its arms untangle, straighten and finally  
Fracture, not a happy deformation.

## The Cat in the Dormitory

by CHAN Kam Chi

The only light in the dormitory  
Was forever from the exit,  
Where it with no doors  
Oozed like a blocked, half hourglass.  
With a drop in the ocean,  
She was now part of the darkness.

But her eyes,  
Behind bars of bunk bed,  
Flickered another.  
And she observed the stars moving in numbers;  
Twinkled twinkled  
Upon mountains of black bodies.



## Door at Home

by CHOI Lok Ching Caesar

“See you next week!”  
 Stretched brows and tensed cheeks  
 till no light from the crevice leaks — shut.  
 What’s the face behind?  
 Does her smile cease?  
 Does she a sigh heave?  
 Oh the shutting of the door is inevitable  
 and is inevitably blunt.

Yet, she’s always there for the door.

Insert, turn, and op—  
 From behind the door: “Tap tap tap”.  
 The sound of hasty steps hastened  
 while the door swings slower than the steps  
 as if to hide the glow  
 in her eyes that comes  
 with the light of home, familiar home  
 that pours over me now late at night.

They’re always there for the door.

## Life-long Swimming Course

by CHOI Lok Ching Caesar

Swimsuit up, shoulder to shoulder, here we start the course:

- First — squeeze through the apparition in railways station (the Atlantic),  
 to reach the start of  
 an obstacle race through wheeling luggage!
- Second — the real race:  
 Shoulder to shoulder; TAKE YOUR MARK.  
 Drain our muscle and mind  
 to take over in no time  
 and pass  
 the racers’ shadow in adjacent line.  
 Heads underwater, as if deaf to cheers  
 deaf to the coach advice, deaf to mutters we can’t hear.  
 Heads underwater, as if blind to what’s ahead  
 and what’s near; off-course, drunk on beers.
- Third — we almost forgot it:  
 Heads up  
 to take  
 a breath,  
 before we drain our energy  
 and pass  
 out with white vision  
 which they (the Indian Ocean) say is just white bubbles.  
 Disperse it and get that  
 Heads-up-for-barely-long-enough-for-an-almost-full-breath breath and-
- Fourth — take a breath barely long enough  
 to notice, from behind  
 a rising wave closing in — SWIM ON!!!!
- Fifth — SWIM ON!
- Sixth — They (the Pacific) handed us food - barely affordable; handed us air  
 mattress — unaffordable.
- Seventh — SWIM ON!
- Tenth — or maybe more - I have lost track, or maybe we all have  
 I forgot how long have I not had my heads up.  
 To breath. To listen. To look. And to see  
 we are a shoal, beaten hitherto  
 by overwhelming waves  
 in different waters, in  
 one endless sea.



## Tick-Tock

by CHUH Andrea Melody

Tock.  
Fixing a clock.

Make sure every piece is screwed  
In the right place.  
Otherwise the clock won't work.

Now surely it must work.  
Otherwise how do we know the time?  
And surely we have to know the time.  
Otherwise how do we know when to work on the clock?

The cogwheels grind and wind,  
The metal creaks and squeaks.

All we need is a little greasing  
To stop this noise  
And smoothen things.

Because surely the clock must work.

Tick.

## The Ladder

by CHUH Andrea Melody

Here you go.  
Climb.

Hold me tight,  
While I bring you up  
To see what I cannot convey.

It's a beautiful view up here,  
I hope you find beauty in me too.

For when the moment comes that I don't matter,  
At least by being thrown away  
I be.

Note: The Ladder can be climbed both up and down.



## Your Hell is My Paradise

by CHUNG Kai Qing Juliana

Once you lay on the soft grass in my paradise,  
Fields of roses you received,  
Their colours kept you alive,  
Their subtle scent put you to sleep.  
Thousands of daffodils that you blew.  
Their gentle touch woke you at dawn.

Once you drank from the streams in my paradise,  
Icing cold water ran down your throat  
It nourished your body,  
It cleansed your soul.  
You bathed in the glistening ponds,  
It washed away the sweat on your bosoms.

Once you laughed with the creatures in my paradise,  
The Ewoks danced around you,  
You followed them into their village,  
You sang joyful songs of their language.  
The Gremlins lifted you up in the air,  
You joined their zestful, giggly fights.

Once you tasted the cherries in my paradise,  
The juice tinted your lips a soft berry red,  
Like drops of blood in the winter snow,  
Like rosebuds waiting to bloom.  
You sucked the milk from coconuts,  
Like babies feeding from their mothers breasts.  
But you wanted more.

You said,  
The grass was too soft,  
The water was too clear,  
The creatures were too cheerful,  
The cherries were too sweet,  
So you left paradise,  
Because it was your hell.

## Malibu and Coke

by CHUNG Kai Qing Juliana

A short, cylinder glass  
Half filled with ice.  
A shot of Malibu Rum,  
Then blackened by Coke.  
He said she liked the drink,  
So he married her.  
The glass is sweating,  
A mime of my face.



## Shall I compare thee to exams' day

by HO Chi Ho, Derek

Shall I compare thee to exams' day?  
Thou art more ugly and more exasperate  
Rough winds do shake the folding notes of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;  
Sometime too bright the morn of cell phone shines,  
And often is his gold snapchat blinks;  
And GPA or grade sometime decline,  
By chance or major's required course unpassed;  
But thy eternal honor shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that grad job ow'st;  
Nor shall death brag thou waiter in his McDonald's,  
When in eternal fries to client thou crispy:  
So long as I can waste my third hon degree,  
So long earns this, and this bring you to "Je(sus)".

## When I See You On the Same Old Road

by HUANG Shuyao

When I see you on the same old road,  
the head light flickers and dies out  
all of a sudden.  
Your Face, blurred, is buried under  
the sheer wool scattered from the moon.  
Strange.  
I can still see you smiling at me.  
I step along the road  
singing Memory under the moonlight.  
Closer, closer, closer  
Your face is clearer

Lights on.  
I see your face  
blank.



## Peter Pan

by HUANG Shuyao

When Peter Pan took Wendy and her siblings to Neverland,  
And beat the Captain Hook with the Lost Boys,

I was happy  
And I was full of energy

Sitting inside an office,  
Now I'm not happy at all

I wish I could go back to the days,  
My happy childhood!

And then I realized

I was happy not because I could fly  
But it was because  
I could imagine myself flying  
Flying like Peter Pan

## Hong Kong taxi

by HUANG Shuyao

I know every story about Hong Kong taxi

They are green

They are red

They are blue

They drive with different stories

If you are curious,

Then you get closer,

They would open the door for you

Any time you need



# Awake

by KWAN Ching Yi Angie

Your contour is brushed upon my forehead  
with water ink,  
wet  
and crystal glassy.  
Am I anointed?  
The rotten strings that tied my body on earth  
are burnt into ashes.  
I stable my body with a hand against the sand  
ascend with trembling feet  
cripple out of the fire  
dress in the smell of incense,  
only to look around the barren vine garden,  
disappointed.  
I cannot see through  
a horizon of darkness.  
Where are You,  
my Beloved?  
Caressing my own forehead,  
I hope to find Your presence,  
only to press my thumb upon the desolated soil.  
Where are You, my Saint?  
Fingers failed,  
I raise my palms,  
then my arms.  
Hold them against the black tent above,  
I receive drips of icy pearls,  
pouring over my filthy body.  
A warm breeze blows upon my face,  
the dim vision lights up.  
Is this the dawn?  
Still I am only with my shadow that hoops on the ground.  
Is this the Circus?<sup>1</sup>

Am I a rabbit on its run?  
I mold the warm breeze into a loyal steed  
which would carry me into the smoked rings,  
a journey to be faded into.  
Cast a dancing spell upon me<sup>2</sup>,  
let me swirl with the magic ship<sup>3</sup>,  
embarked is the trip.

<sup>1</sup> Reference to Mr Tambourine Man: "circled by the circus sands".

<sup>2</sup> Reference to Mr Tambourine Man: "cast your dancing spell my way I promise to go under it".

<sup>3</sup> Reference to Mr Tambourine Man: "[t]hen take me disappearin' through the smoke rings of my mind".



## Mr. Tambourine Man, Play a Song of Wandering for Me

by KWAN Ching Yi Angie

"I am not sleepy and there is no place I am going to,"  
The little arrow bearded round face keeps running  
He waits for no one  
Not until I picked my apple orange or strawberry  
Cobble Sand Marble  
Double Single  
Happy or Sorrow  
Soon before I noticed  
"My toes too numb to step  
Wait only for my boot heels to be wandering  
I'm ready to go anywhere"  
The knight is confused  
Where are You, my Quest?  
A lady to be saved?  
A King to be defended?  
A Dragon to be slain?  
I wish there to be a green gap in Time  
I could rest  
Stretch like a starfish  
Stare at the Blue  
Blow a long sigh until the ink in my stomach are dried  
Moistening the Clouds at the background  
So I could look up  
not to a sky of Grey  
but the color of youth  
Yet I am afraid,  
what is the tone of young days?  
Sweat or a Sacred Bet?  
Sir, please play a song for me  
So I could dance and forget

## Divorce I — 'Beg you, dear'

by LAI Lok Yi Sally

The curtain, the sofa, the cup set  
Chosen by you and bought by me  
You like them and  
So do I

The curtain, the sofa, the cup set  
Still here  
Without any dust, without any warmth  
Just here

The curtain, the sofa, the cup set  
remind me of our connection  
the connection we had had  
in the days with laughs

Can you open the curtain for me?  
Can you come and sit here?  
Can you drink and chat?  
I wish you could



## Goodbye, my love

by LAI Lok Yi Sally

Your finger softly,  
Wiped my droplets  
Embraced me in you, the stove

Using the silver to circle me  
Wrote our little names  
with the white feather

Sun and moon,  
Pimples and wrinkles  
Red and white

Blessing the sea  
With your little pieces  
As your last work

## I know you are waiting

by LUK Sin Kwan

I know you are waiting  
in the yellow light under an antique lamp post  
breathing out white mist, trying to figure out  
since when  
the world has become such an unfamiliar place.  
Words solidify at the tip of your tongue  
You choke, then swallow. You have no choice.  
Everything melts, anyway.  
The world remains silent. Deafening. Maddening. Yet  
I know you are waiting.  
The cold has taken you by surprise  
Solitude comes in waves  
Engulfing you in whole, while you count your fingers  
and the days you have left. I know you are waiting  
for blossoms to bloom and sparrows to sing  
for life to be awakened  
in the world, and you.  
I know you are waiting, patiently and endlessly  
for Hours to pass and  
Summer to come.



## Forgotten Hymns

by LUK Sin Kwan

The auburn woods, the ever-flowing jade  
Not heavenly creations but proof of men's damnation  
The burning forests, the polluted river  
Hands soaked red with no chance of redemption  
O men Repent!  
For these ought to be deeds no one dared commit.  
O men Rejoice!  
For you have killed God with ignorance and greed.

## Time is of the Essence

by Lisa LIANG

I stare off into the abyss without seeing —  
The vastness of this city unheeded.  
The heavy pages are turned slowly.  
The fleeting daylight bleeds through.

The light shivers as I read.  
I count down the stifled hours,  
The agonizing minutes,  
The uncertain seconds.

To what do I owe this feeling?  
To whom?  
What is sleep?  
The spiteful rain pelts over my head.

“Take cover,” it whispers.



## Forgotten Memories

by Lisa LIANG

At the foot of the hill  
Stands an evergreen tree.  
Tall and wise for all to see.  
Face flushed and fingers cold,  
Can you imagine all the secrets it holds?

## A take on *Après la bataille* by Victor Hugo

by Deepen NEBHWANI

My father is a smiling hero  
With a lone house that he liked  
He's muscly and tall  
Going to battle on his horse on the night of a battle  
He's a covered champion of the death of night  
He's a semblance of a light noise  
An armed Spaniard is on the route  
Who was singing on the route's borders  
Raining but bruised, livid and slightly dead  
He said "Drink! Drink Pity me"  
My father, with an emu, tended to him  
Passed him a gourd of rum  
And said "teens, give a blessed drink to him"  
At that moment the house passed gas  
The man became manure  
He took a pistol and screamed  
Caramba!  
A coup almost happened as the bullet went past  
And the horse threw a fit  
"Give him a drink" said my father



## Hourglass

by Deepen NEBHWANI

White sand underneath, white sand above

A pile of sand dropping, glittering

Like a pillar connecting the sky

And the ground

If you want

To find

Your

self

Dig

Dig

Dig

Dig

Go on

Dig deeper

Seek yourself there

When you finally reach the bottom

Buried under the white sand, hard to find

You'll see, the true you under the annals of year

But don't get too deep to the past you, you'll suffocate by the sand

## Fire

by Natalie NG Lok Wing

The flicker of flames drifts  
between the hues of orange and yellow  
The warmth coming from the wick  
Such tenderness in its movement

Yet fire  
is far too dangerous  
to be played with  
For it is the most exquisite form  
of self destruction

Your flicker of flames hovers  
between the hues of red and purple  
So eerily different  
Yet  
Hypnotizing

I never knew that fire could love  
that the light in your eyes  
could ignite something brighter  
than the stars in the sky  
that your flames could burn down my walls  
and bring about a firestorm in my mind  
that your warmth could melt my heart  
from a million miles away  
You promised the fire would never burn out  
Your words smelt of smoke  
And mine turned to ash  
When the flame burned out  
I found fuel for your heart  
I watched you burn everything in our path  
Including me  
and the one million promises you swore to keep  
This time around  
Your flames burned down all the walls around my heart  
leaving behind scorched embers  
and bleeding wounds

My heart might forever reek of ash  
And I will never be able to go back  
But fire  
is far too beautiful  
to not be played with.



# 3am

by Natalie NG Lok Wing

I like the silence at 3am.

The slow dance of the infinite stars  
 The wonderland of the countless dreamers  
 The abyss of the unknowns and heartaches  
 The tranquillity of the moment  
 The realization of the difference  
 between loneliness  
 and solitude

The little people in my mind  
 running around  
 bumping into walls  
 bruising every inch of the wall  
 pulling out dreams  
 and memories  
 jumping to conclusions  
 making up excuses  
 overanalyzing  
 overthinking

When I tilt my head to look up at the sky  
 The bright-burning stars no more  
 Instead  
 A sea of darkness  
 A tangled mess of heartstrings untied  
 An intricacy too complex to comprehend

But Darling  
 Don't tell  
 Don't let them know you're falling apart  
 For the thousandth time.  
 Don't let them know you need more  
 than what you can have  
 than what they can give

They put themselves first  
 Like everyone else  
 Even after you've shown them all the stars  
 In your sky

Maybe it's not enough  
 Maybe it's too much

Maybe it's just me blinded  
 by the darkness at 3am

When the sun comes  
 This will feel like a dream again  
 with the realization that I  
 let the demons win last night

Better luck next time.



## Colors

by Ashley NG Wing Ki

I was red,  
And you told me you liked me for my burning intensity.  
But then I got a bit blue,  
You turned away and announced how lilac was too ambiguous for you.  
Now I have dyed myself white,  
Like a humble canvas waiting for the scalping brush,  
Stroke by stroke,  
Piece by piece,  
Until every bit of me disappears  
Into the better vision you had in mind,  
when you first said you like me.

## The Suit

by Ashley NG Wing Ki

He wore his best suit on the train to London,  
Age of 78, eyes of blue, caution in his breath.  
“when I die, it’ll be in a suit.”  
So, he wore the same suit day after day,  
Living with conscious of his mortality,  
Confidence in his well-dressed and prepared fatality,  
Waiting  
And not waiting.

At what age should we start wearing that suit?



## Fireworks in my Mind

by Angie TAM On Chi

In that early summer night,  
When the evening primrose blossoms —  
I met you.  
Your eyes —  
Holding sparking, flickering lights, like constellation in the sky.  
Overwhelmed by blazing stars,  
The spark of night, amongst the dark,  
And guide me through the dead of night.

In that immense endless night,  
You are the fireworks that unfold in my sky.  
Blazing flames and burning fire,  
Forming golden, sparkly, red and glistening orange,  
Fairy Flower —

Flickering flames then soon turn into consuming fire —  
But tempting is, the mountains of fiery red and burning orange  
Forming a crimson tongue, swirling up and consuming my sky —  
No — Don't —

Your dazzling, shimmery —  
Captivating light,  
Mesmerized am I, impossible to conquer — powerless to resist —  
Your light, glistening in the gloom,  
Luring me to stay and accompany you in the endless delightful night.

Then, the last luminous golden flower dimes  
Turns into fading dusty-gold little strokes that slowly falls —  
Before barely hitting the skyline, they totally dissolved.  
And merged with the fog.  
Now that all the fiery flowers perished,  
The mist — the fog —  
The blurred-out, shadowy sky,  
And unclear paths ahead  
Become so strikingly noticeable.

Under the blurry sky,  
The only thing visible is this deformed and defeated shadow.

I wander from heaven to hell — then fire to ice —

Shivering, trembling, warm sunbeam from the sky,  
Meadows, shedding leaves, all in my eyes.  
Rotten — Withered —  
The evening primrose no longer shines,  
But forever it is — captured in my mind.



# Heung Gong Yan

by Angie TAM On Chi

Heung Gong, my home  
 Painted with red, blue and green.  
 Where dragon of the East and eagle from the West meet  
 And phoenix of the East and unicorn from the West gather.

Old rusty green trams,  
 With *ding ding* sounds —  
 Our past and history.  
 Boom and buzz at night —  
 Lullaby to a baby's cot.

Familiar faces,  
 Here and there —  
*Gaai fong* and neighbors  
 Waving to us their dearest hellos and goodbyes  
 Every day and night.

Unique coffee shops that sells  
 Oolong tea and hot coffee  
 Sits in the middle of busy streets.  
 By the big burning bright lanterns  
 With golden trim and tassels,  
 Of Eastern enchantment.  
 Hang opposite to —  
 Thin towers with wooden bay windows,  
 Reminiscence of the Victorian era.

Little stores  
 Sit in where two alleys converge —  
 Selling water and cigarettes  
 With prices,  
 Handwritten by red and blue markers  
 On old cardboards.

Yum cha on Sundays,  
 Choosing din sum on the trolley  
 Pulled by the saleswoman

Shouting  
 “*Caa siu baau, saang zin baau, haa gaau, siu mai*”

Tiny shops  
 Providing —  
*Zaa daai coeng* dressed in red and yellow  
*Cau dau fu*  
 And its addicting odor found in the air far away.

Lights and warmth from each family  
 Forming constellation in the sky.  
 And neon lights,  
 Advertisement  
 In bright red, green and blue.  
 Strokes and words that form a complicated and mesmerizing puzzle  
 Of culture and history, waiting to be solved.  
 Up close,  
 Are like maps alive.  
 While from far behind,  
 Forms a one-of-a-kind milky way  
 That lights up our sky.

*Heung Gong Yan*,  
 Visit *Heung Gong* with a traveler's guide and a new mind.

*Heung Gong* — 香港, Hong Kong  
*Heung Gong Yan* — 香港人, Hong Kong people  
*Gaai fong* — 街坊, neighbours  
*Caa siu baau* — 叉燒包, BBQ sauce pork bun  
*saang zin baau* — 生煎包, Pan-fried pork bun  
*haa gaau* — 蝦餃, Shrimp dumplings  
*siu mai* — 燒賣, Siu mai, a type of Chinese dumpling usually with ground pork and shrimp  
*Zaa daai coeng* — 炸大腸, Deep-fried pig intestine  
*Cau dau fu* — 臭豆腐, Stinky tofu



## The Sun in Keswick, Cumbria

by TANG Hiu Yin, Kelly

Never have I seen this sun before — or have I?  
Tender rays diffused over the mountains  
like whiskers of it rubbing on the land,  
radiating its intense passion-  
Are you the sun I know? For the folks say  
one's temper changes when travelling,  
is that the reason you seem even more perfect  
than who I've been meeting for twenty years?  
Never have I been so intimate with you, without  
concrete obstacles standing between us,  
Never have you spent so many hours to  
accompany me, taking selfies in your glow until 9pm,  
sitting in silence with you after supper,  
feeling you purring with mild warmth upon me, that  
star gazing is no longer romantic here.  
Scratches over the dim blue sky appear at the late night,  
when your claws are reluctant in waving goodbye —  
but no worries my beloved Keswick's, for our affair  
will start again tomorrow  
in the early morning,  
when my other half in Hong Kong go drowsy again.

## A quote by Martin Luther King Jr.

by TOH Jia Huey Phoebe

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness;  
Only light can do that.  
Hate cannot drive out hate;  
Only love can do that.”

One can see darkness without light;  
But one cannot see light without darkness.

Is there a reason why one can only see light with open eyes?  
Is there a reason why one can see darkness even with closed eyes?

Is there a reason why this world is scattered with sin,  
why people are filled with poison,  
why words are dripped in venom?

Is there a reason why people remember the bad rather than the good,  
why TV anchors report murders,  
why news headlines are full of the word “crime”?

Are all the bad in the world existing,  
so we could see the good?

One can see darkness without light;  
but one cannot see light without darkness.



## Redefining home

by WONG Sze Chun

The sun is hiding himself and  
The Sky is blending into a piece of white paper which with no edges.  
Rainbow is now living in ocean in a twisted shape.  
Races are no longer exists in terms of colours.  
Plants are not green anymore  
But still are tall and  
Regiments of gases are escaping from it.  
Horror stories can't be told  
Since the timing is never right.  
John Keats will not be famous  
Because he cannot write about "Bright Star".  
Don't let this poem be read by our grandsons  
Or they will be mad at us all.

## The Tissues

by WONG Sze Chun

The tissues are everywhere and various.  
The tissues however are single-minded and only serve one person.  
The tissues follow their masters.  
The tissues stand by every minute.  
The tissues know the pulse and the temperature perfectly.  
The tissues are meant to be abandoned.  
The tissues are cheap and replaceable.  
The tissues sacrifice themselves to accept filth.  
The tissues are treated with ruthlessness.  
The tissues are torn apart.  
The tissues are flushed away.  
The tissues are soaked.  
The tissues receive no thanks.  
The tissues are water skiing in drains.  
The tissues are laying on soil.  
The tissues are decaying  
The tissues are decaying  
The tissues are decaying  
The tissues are decaying along with DNA.



## Camera

by Jerry XUE

My parents fold their fingers into a peace sign  
My hands reach for the button on the camera  
I look into the camera lens  
What do I see?  
I see the Eiffel tower, I see the Great Wall of China,  
and I see the Statue of liberty.  
But where are my parents?

## Moments

by Jerry XUE

The pink table  
It is flirting with me  
It is attracted to my intelligence

My pen case  
Beaten day after day  
Still is brave, it is there for me  
Only me

The phone is shouting  
I don't want to give him my attention  
Why have I bought such a thing?

Febe is purple  
Extra but just right

Coffee beans are dancing  
the rhythm is energetic  
I feel alive

The food consumes me  
I am yet again distracted

What have I done  
In the past 8 hours?



## Home is where the heart is

by Kuhu VANACKÈRE

Raised in the West  
Born in the East  
I have come to the place where they both meet  
Like a child falling into his mother's lap  
I've found a seat at this colourful table  
I cannot let go  
When the thought of leaving comes to my mind  
My vision is blurred and my lashes wet  
Fast yet slow  
The neons will turn off  
Even though the grey skies will follow me where I go back  
The mountains and the trees are here to stay  
Changing rhythm and pace  
Will burn my sensitive skin  
It will feel like falling down and my soul will bleed  
But I always heel  
Always get back on my feet  
And keep walking  
Until I fall in love again  
And it starts over

## Our Love

by Kuhu VANACKÈRE

It is rough as an old pair of jeans  
Yet smooth as velvet  
Sometimes it tastes like  
Lemon-infused water  
That has been sitting in the fridge too long  
But most times it makes both of us feel like kids  
Eating strawberries  
in a garden  
It now resembles a mirror  
Made of shattered pieces of glass  
Yet it is diamond-like  
I hope it lasts forever  
And that our scars will be forgotten



## Luciana

by Christine VICERA

He told us stories  
of the food you prepared.  
All these years  
the citrus marinade  
for the bangús,  
stung his taste buds.

He told us stories  
of how you would  
hum lullabies.  
Incandescent fragments  
that brought warmth  
to a frail family photo frame.

He told us stories  
of how you hid the bottles  
and bore the pain.  
“It keeps your arteries clean,”  
you would tell them,  
convincing yourself.

My sunshine,  
you bloomed  
out of concrete.

You danced  
like lightning,  
Uma Thurman  
in the Tarantino movie.

You faded  
too quick  
for me  
to realise  
you were there.

## Aperture

by Christine VICERA

I was 7 when I asked him,  
why he had to stop at every corner,  
of Cotton Tree Drive,  
to steal sepia-toned snaps,  
through the lens of a 35mm.

How did you explain  
to a 7 year-old  
that memory and forgetting  
are lovers who are on the run  
from consciousness?

Left to our own devices,  
we connect to disconnect,  
storing memory,  
onto SD cards. Click;

and the cost?  
Experiences bartered  
for pixels,  
on a 5-inch display.

“Anak,  
The camera retains,  
what our brains cannot,”  
With his right-eye,  
locked into the viewfinder.

These memories  
will not atrophy.



# Growth

by Stephanie WONG

A seed remained buried  
until your gentle hands  
aimlessly caressed  
the weathered soil  
that lay bare for you  
to uncover

your emergence  
guided the sunlight  
that willed the seed  
to take root

and your warmth  
enveloped the sapling  
despite the distance

breathing air,  
that it had forgotten  
needn't be tarred  
by the harsh  
choking fumes,

and with time  
it grows,  
it grows,  
it grows,

waiting for  
the flower  
to bloom.



# *Time and Place Matter Not*

*Lau Sze Man*

*Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2017*







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