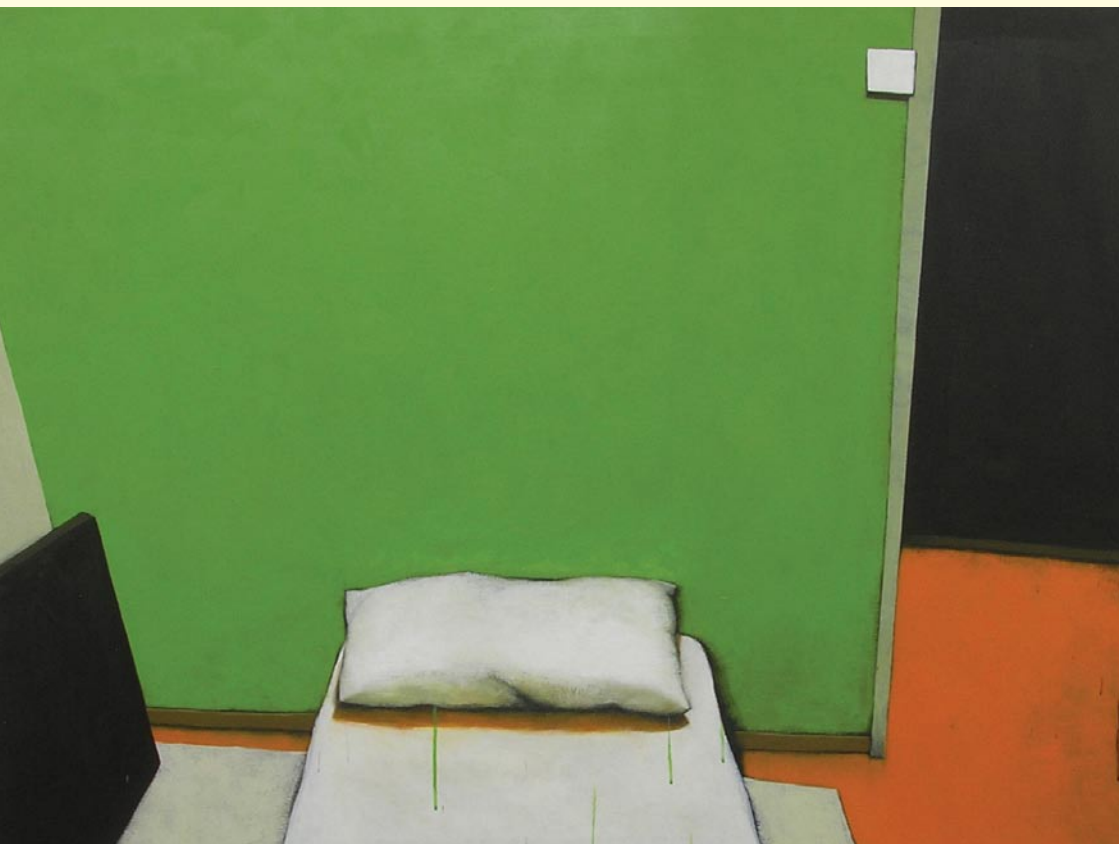


CU

Writing in English

Volume VI / 2006



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Preface (Story Section)

When we began assembling short stories for CU Writing, we were dazzled by the power of the stories and their ambition of enlarging our view of the world. All the stories are inspiring and impressive in both plot and language. However, there is a limited number of stories we could include in the space of this collection, and difficult decisions had to be made. Most stories in this selection are based on the setting of Hong Kong, and the period covered is from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. The stories present to us transformations of characters, reflections on human relationships, disclosure of hidden truths, as well as haunting representations of lives. With their imagination, creativity and originality, writers have created convincing characters in their experience of the joy and sadness of life. And the stories they wrote explore the still changing forms of the short story.

We would like to thank Professor Parker for his support and advice, without which we would not be able to complete this collection, and special thanks to Miss Tracy Liang for her generous help and guidance.

Finally, we hope that readers will enjoy reading these stories – a kaleidoscope of contemporary lives.

Jasmine Lai

Wendy Wong

Stephanie Ng

A Prefatory Sestina (Poetry Section)

Welcome to this section of *CU Writing!*
We present to you our classmates' poetry –
Strings of delicately arranged words and letters.
Exhibited together they show
Iridescent images, cavorting imagination,
Ideas which can energize even stationary pigeonholes.

We often dropped by our rectangular pigeonholes
Throughout the semester, unfolding Sara's comments
On our pieces woven from imagination.
Days slipped by during the birth of our poetry,
And our reward was great: making
Vivid pictures out of two-dimensional letters.

At semester's end we heard from Sara
Inviting us to be the editors. We set up a pigeonhole
Receiving entries from 16 summer busy bees.
They showed how amazing the Muse's lyre could be,
And all the lyrical writings were a minuet,
A sonata or a nocturnal in the World of Poetry.
You can taste reality, emotions and imagination –

When you feel stressed, take a cup of imagination
Served in this collection. Appreciate the shimmering letters,
Smell a waft of life from the rhythmic lines of poetry.
They can recall nostalgic memories. Or dig out pigeonholed

Images from your brain. Poetry
Has qualities and power no other art can show.

Sara said, “The motto of writing poems
Should be to show, to transcend
Imagery from imitation to imagination,
But never to tell.” Entwine the two-dimensional letters
With stereophonic voices in your heart
Into words, into the pigeonhole
Or Literature. *Carpe diem*— flee to the World of Poetry.

Listen— it’s the heartbeat of our poetry
Which urges Betsy, Carol, Christine W., and Charlie’s
Genuine feelings to show through lines. Stimulation
Walks lines into Elaine and Etta’s pigeonholes,
And bursts in flames igniting Christine L.,
Cindy, and Fiona’s creative power.
Ivy, Jean and Jenny toy with the enchanted letters
To ricochet on Katrina, Kitty, Tina and Venom’s art.

A ninety-degree bow is sent to Professor Parker,
Ms. Sara Newland and Tracy to show
Our grateful hearts. Without them,
Our imagination might still be in a pigeonhole;
And now like winged letters our poetry
Soars freely to every admirer of writing.

Charlie NG Chak-kwan
Christine LEUNG Mei-yee
Tina CHENG Ting-ting

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Growing Clear

Melody, Yue Wan In

ONE

Every time I step into *Barnes & Noble* it takes me a few hours to get out, although driving to Oakland and treasure-hunting in the store has become my routine on Sunday afternoons.

Last week, I noticed stacks of *Best New American Voices 2005* with a reduced price of \$4.99 in a quiet corner. What a waste. I truly hope some day people will appreciate something other than bespectacled wizards!

YI

Stuck on the damp bench, Wai tried to hold her fingers steady on her lap but the ten trembling little fellows kept sliding down.

The little girl who was sitting on the swing stretched her body to bring herself higher. Her long dark hair soared and then rested on her shoulders, and then flew in the air again as she swung forward. As the girl was having fun of her own, the iron chains made some *EEK EEK* sounds that made Choco climb onto Wai's lap. She felt him shivering when she placed her hand on his white furry back.

Wai stared down and met the pair of innocent red eyes. How could the fate of a pure soul like him be determined by someone like Ka Yi?

"Bitch." Wai whispered.

It had been two days since she had run away with Choco. The school uniform she was wearing had once been tidy and clean; but now it was stuck with dust and mud. She had itches all over her body.

All the money she had taken with her was spent. Her stomach was empty that she could only feel the fluid inside.

Admit defeat? Not now. Never. It wasn't her fault in the first place. Ka Yi should never have shouted at her like that.

There was certainly nothing Ka Yi liked more than minding Wai's business. For the fifteenth time, the tall image of Ka Yi two days ago emerged in her mind. Wai recalled the argument when she went home with Choco after school.

Ka Yi was standing in the middle of the living room, her arms crossed in front of her chest, her suntan face dropped with a frown, her big dark eyes fixed on Choco as if they wanted to emit a laser beam to kill him.

“What's with the rabbit?”

“Someone left it in the lift. I want to keep it.”

“No you can't. Our house is too crowded already and we cannot afford a pet.”

“I will pay for all the expenses.”

“No. Think about it. Who's going to clean up when it pees in the house?”

“I can do it!”

“Ha ha ha. Now our dear Miss Lui Ka Wai wants to do some housework!” Ka Yi stepped closer to Wai and shook her head, “but no, we can't keep the rabbit.”

Wai gave her sister a fierce glare.

“You might as well give your eyes a break. The answer is no,” Ka Wai stayed firm. Behind the rimless glasses were her dark eyes, always reflecting false authority and rules and control, staring straight back at her.

“Ah!” Wai shouted and took a swing at Ka Yi.

Her fist was grabbed before it made its way to Ka Yi's abdomen. Almost immediately, she was slapped across the face. Tears began to rush out of her eyes as her left cheek burnt. She turned around for the door.

"Hey...What do you think you're doing?"

Wai ignored her sister's question. She opened the iron gate of the flat and ran out to the lobby and entered the lift.

"Are you out of your mind? Hey! Hey!"

"Wai!!"

The doors closed. Wai's ears could finally open.

Eek.. Eek.. There came the awakening sounds from the present.

Wai seemed to hear Ka Yi's creepy voice once again. She remembered when Ka Yi uttered the word "mind", she was totally out of tune. She always spoke out of tune. That was why Wai always put her iPod earphones on.

Choco had long stopped hopping. He was sitting there quietly and staring back at Wai.

If nobody fed him anything soon, he could die of hunger.

She suddenly remembered that there was a bag of lettuce on top of the fridge back at home. How she wished she had taken that with her!

What had Mum cooked for dinner tonight? She had promised Wai to make her favourite dishes last week. Perhaps she had not cooked... She probably hadn't. How could she possibly do anything when Wai had run away from home? All she would do was to sink in the sofa and cry. Every time Wai did something wrong, Mum cried. And whenever Wai apologized, she gave her an embrace and told her that it did not matter.

"What is the point?" asked Wai, lost in the image of Mum's silver

hair.

Standing up, she turned homeward.

Choco sneezed. Wai jerked.

The cruelty. The annoyance. Why would Ka Yi want to stand in her way every second? Who did she think she was, to be bossy to her sister and indifferent to an abandoned animal?

Wai held Choco closer to her chest. All of a sudden, the way Ka Yi held the wooden box under her bed flashed through her mind.

If Ka Yi had the right to steal Wai's freedom, Wai had the right to steal stuff from her.

"That is only fair." Wai accelerated her steps.

THREE

Kasey Wong is a name which will eventually appear in one of the *Best New American Voices* books. I never have a single doubt about that - because I know I am a gifted writer. I have been writing for four years. I got As in English when I was in high school. I have sharp observation and a brilliant imagination. I am constantly improving my writing. I am willing to accept constructive criticisms.

I did not realize that almost all of the stories I'd written so far were completely fictional realistic stories until very recently. The teacher in a creative writing class told us to write a story based on our own experiences. That was quite a challenge, since my personal life is incredibly, unbelievably boring. *Barnes & Noble bookseller* at Jack London Square, Oakland and my imaginative world are the only places where I can seem to find excitement. Sunday afternoons and my daily writing time are when I can find interest in my life.

Having in mind that other people's lives were more dramatic to write about and the teacher would not investigate if it was really my

own experience, I started writing a story for the class assignment.

SEI

Punching the key into the keyhole, Wai pushed the door to reveal the dark living room.

There was no time to waste. Wai hurried to the bedroom, switched on the light, put Choco on the floor and reached under Ka Yi's bed. She was forbidden to even touch the box but... to hell with the brutal woman's rules. There must be a lot of money being hidden in the box. Someone as boring as Ka Yi would not hide anything other than that.

Wai opened the box as soon as it was pulled out. There was no money inside but a few envelopes with stamps that read USA. In the middle, they all said:

Ka Yi Lui
Flat 2113
On Mei House, Cheung On Estate
Tsing Yi, N.T.
Hong Kong

At the top left corners, they all said:

Andrew Wong
1610 Eagle Avenue
Alameda, CA 94501

"Who is Andrew Wong? Why did he write to Ka Yi?" Wai squinted. She picked up the envelope on the top.

Dear Ka Yi,

How are you? Haven't heard from you for a while. I hope you're fine. It has been a while since I came here. Everything is going well

so far.

I finally got myself a license. My family is glad that I made it within such a short time. As I have told you, it is hard to go around without a car here. Hopefully we can get used to the life here quite soon.

~~I want to tell~~ There is something I think I should tell you. My mother has been insisting on getting me and her friend's daughter engaged. I kept saying no but she never gave up. So I just said yes yesterday. I still love you...but you haven't written to me for six months already. ~~Sorry~~, I don't want my parents to decide everything but it seems to be the only way out.

Please write to me soon.

Yours, Andrew

What on earth was that? As far as Wai remembered, there was not an Andrew on Ka Yi's list of ex-boyfriends. But this, this was obviously a love letter and Ka Yi had been hiding it.

She picked up the second envelope.

Dear Ka Yi,

What's up? Things are good here.

It was spring break last week and our family went to New York. We visited the Statue of Liberty, Bronx Zoo, the Central Park, Times Square and Wall Street. New York is ~~beauti~~ so cool. I've attached a postcard I got from there. Some day we should go there together!☺

School is about to start again. Hopefully I'm doing better in the next semester. Mum is pushing me hard. She said if I wanted to go to UC Berkeley, I must improve my English. You should also work hard for the HKCEE. I think you can make it!

To answer your question, I think 'Wai' is a good name for a child

because it means 'clever'. 'Yan' is not as good, I think, because it just means 'happy'. Being clever is better than just being happy. But it is just my opinion, you can tell your aunt to ignore that.

Mum just called me to have dinner. I must go. Love you. Please write back.

Please write to me soon.

Yours, Andrew

“Now that’s absurd,” Wai thought, “we don’t even talk to any of our aunts.” And this Andrew talked bullshit. Being clever was no better than being happy. In fact it was much worse. Ignorance is bliss. Intelligence is a curse. The more you see about the world, the more you hate it.

Dear Ka Yi,

.....

Yours, Andrew

FIVE

I wrote a story of
a beautiful young lady
falling in love with a
middle-aged businessman
who already has a wife, and
ends up killing herself. It was a good story
that reminds me of an
old buddy whom I used
to cry for every day.
I even shed

a warm tear after rereading. However, the teacher gave me a big cross after reading my story, with a big question:

What is the FOCUS?

Also, the narrator seems like a total outsider in the story who doesn't know what is going on.

Try to work with the characters' emotions.

Writing is not that hard, is it? I'm still a decent writer?

LUK

Wai investigated the postmarks carefully. The letters were all written in the late 80s and early 90s, when Ka Yi was still a teenager. Andrew Wong was probably her lover then.

Reaching for the bottom of the box, Wai noticed a corner of a piece of thick pink paper. She pulled the corner and saw the old Hong Kong arms with the British crown on it, below the arms printed the words 'Birth Certificate'. Beneath them Wai saw her own name - three big Chinese characters vertically written in black.

Then she saw other three big Chinese characters also written that way: "Lui", "Ka" and "Yi", in a box that said **MOTHER**.

Wai's mind went blank, like the box that said **FATHER**. She would like to think that it was some kind of a joke - but she couldn't, nor could she really think of anything. She didn't want to believe it. But it was written in black and white and it made perfect sense - Ka Yi was sixteen years older and Mum and Dad were in their late sixties.

Overwhelmed, she held the paper and waited as she was turning into a statue. She did not hear the door being opened and the feet walking near where she was.

Someone opened the door of Ka Yi's room.

"Wai! What the hell are yo..." Ka Yi gasped, "...doing."

Ka Yi suddenly lost her strength that she had to lean on the door rim. The pink paper was shaking in the air, so was the hand that held it. In her uniform which was stained, Wai was sitting on the floor motionless. Her empty eyes fixed on the three characters "Lui", "Ka" and "Yi".

"Why?" Wai threw a word as the three characters became blurry.

Ka Yi couldn't answer. She turned around and saw her mother, eyes wide opened and a hand over her mouth.

"Why!" Wai snarled as she stood up to throw the paper at Ka Yi.

The rewind button was pressed, fragments of memory ran around in Ka Yi's brain. Andrew's awkward smile, their first kiss, his heavy suitcase, baby Wai's fragile fingers. Everything that had seemed pleasant all popped up and became unbearable. Her head was going to blow.

She gathered a little energy and walked to the door.

She opened it.

She left.

Everybody wished they had a slight idea of what was happening.

SEVEN

According to m-w.com, one of the definitions of focus is "a center of activity, attraction, or attention." If a good story needs to have a focus, it probably means that it must have a certain point to direct readers' attention to.

Bearing in mind the definition of a focus, I read through my past works. And I find most of them focusless.

BAAT

Love once was forever to her.

“Andrew was Ka Yi’s classmate in Secondary Four. He made a rose bookmark and gave it to Ka Yi on her fifteenth birthday. She had fallen in love with him since then.”

Not their age, not their parents, not their teachers, not their studies... She thought nothing could stand between their affections.

However, something did destroy their love. A year after they have been seeing each other, Andrew’s family emigrated to the U.S.A. It was also when Ka Yi discovered that she was pregnant.

“She was ashamed of herself. She didn’t want to tell anyone about the baby. She only told us about that when she could no longer hide her big tummy.”

“But why?”

“She wanted to continue her study so she went back to school after giving birth to you. I promised her to take care of you.”

“Why must you lie to me?”

“Trust me. We didn’t intend to lie to you.”

“But you did.”

“Ka Yi wanted you to grow up in a healthy family.”

Wai stared at Mum, whom she just realized was her grandmother. “Does all this make her happy now?”

Mum sighed and put a hand on Wai’s shoulder. “We love you all the same. This, I am sure, doesn’t change.”

Before she burst into tears, Wai quickly hugged her grandmother so that she wouldn’t see her cry. She buried her head in the warmest and softest skin in the world.

“Sor nui.¹” Mum took Wai’s hand gently and slowly led her to the bathroom. “Wash your face. We will look for Ka Yi together.”

1 Cantonese phrase with a similar meaning of “Silly girl.”

NINE

“Kasey, a writer’s road is long and rough.” My father looks up from today’s *San Francisco Chronicle*.

“Dare to dream when you’re young. Don’t give up easily. I gave up a lot when I was young. Now all I can do is to regret.” He puts down the newspaper and continues. “I knew you were gifted when you were born. That’s why I’ve bought you so many books.”

“I don’t know how to solve my problems.”

He rubs the back of my head. “Go out and explore and enrich yourself. If you cannot find your focus here, find it somewhere else.”

He signs a cheque and books an air ticket to Hong Kong during my spring break.

“Go to Hong Kong, your mother and I were born there. I have an old acquaintance there too. I can write to her and see if she can help.” He quickly starts to scribble on a paper.

ZUP

The thin shadow of Ka Yi sat on the bench. She was looking at her shivering fingers. She always had troubles making them steady when she was nervous. The tears on her face were dried and now they itched. The swing stood still in front of her. She was all alone in the park. Fifteen years ago, she was sitting on the same bench but at that time she had baby Wai sleeping in her arms.

“Aye.” Ka Yi felt someone sitting next to her. “It is freezing here. Go home.”

It was Wai. Ka Yi did not turn to look at her.

“Sorry.” Wai whispered.

Trying to hold back her tears, Ka Yi shook her head hard.

“Don’t ‘no’ la. Come home with me. Mum and Dad, and I, and Choco are waiting for you.” Wai reached out her hand.

11

When I step into the Arrival Hall B, I immediately notice a big card with my full name “**KASEY WONG**”.

I walk closer and study the girl who is holding it. She is tall and slim, about four or five years older than me. Her long curly hair falls upon her shoulders. Her face is pink, reflecting vitality. She waves when she sees me approaching.

“Welcome.” She greets.

“I’m Kasey.” I send a smile.

“You can call me Wai.” She returns a smile and offer to help me with one of my suitcases.

Wai brings me to the Airport bus terminal, we stand at the bus station for route A31, which heads to a place called “Tsuen Wan (Discovery Park)”.

“I actually live in a place called Tsing Yi. We will go there first and let you meet my mother, your father’s friend. So we are going to get off the bus at the first station after Tsing Ma Bridge.”

“Tsing Ma Bridge.”

“Yes.”

“...Wai, what is your job?”

“I’m a postgraduate student in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, major in Physics.”

“Oh I see. Erm...”

“Why?”

“Just curious. Do you know anything about focus?”

“Well, the focus in optics means a point where images can be seen

clearly.”

We get on the bus.

“Focus is where everything is clear?” I ask again.

“You could say that.” She smiles again.

Because of my luggage, we need to sit in the lower deck. We sit opposite to each other.

I am dozing off when Wai taps my shoulder. “We are on Tsing Ma Bridge.”

Tsing Ma Bridge isn’t as marvelous as I thought it would be. It is like a new version of the Golden Gate Bridge. But somehow I like it.

“I like how clean and neat it looks.” I say to Wai. She nods.

The bus continues its way on the Tsang Ma Bridge.

We exchanges glances, and immediately feel a connection. She smiles at me. I pick up my lenses, and begin to construct a story of Lui Ka Wai, my half sister, in my deepest reverie.

The sea below,
the sky above.

The view in the front window is ever so clear.

Poetic Reflection

This term I always carried a file stuffed with poems.
Nearly every weekend I saw sixteen pairs of eyes,
Brown and black, of different sizes. We read words
In lines and stanzas, sitting in seats thin as orange
Peels. Sometimes German sounds flowed in through the windows,
While Sara stood, decorated the board with verbal drawings.

Week by week we played magic with words. See! Drawings
Emerged from paper when our poems
Were read! Some of us looked out of the windows
Every hour to spot our Muse. A few eyes
Blinked and kangaroos dancing on an orange
Appeared! In a flash we captured them with specific words.

Whenever lips moved we saw “Words, words, words.”¹
We grabbed some and packed them in our developing “drawings,”
Like old ladies examining and picking *Sunkist* oranges
In a supermarket. Yes, to earn check-plus for our poems
From time to time we had to train our eyes
And see beyond concrete walls as if they were windows.

Some, I know, tap-danced on sills near closed windows,
Composed exotic beats later recorded on black tapes of words;
Some bounced on walls ping-pong balls large as cow eyes,
Scratching their heads as bronze frames of drawings
Fell and hit the ground - constructing strong rhythms in poems
Was like squeezing juice out of a disobedient orange.

1 A line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Ready for more challenges? Sniff at an orange-
Blossom and click the internet icons on Windows XP,
Look for sestina, villanelle and pantoum – poems
Which kept a close eye on their sons of words.

It was best to place them next to *Matisse's*² drawings,
See them beam like children's smiling eyes.

Cohering pieces planted themselves onto my mind: sleepy eyes
Brightened by ideas succulent as an orange;
Whispers and giggles after distribution of magazine drawings;
Silver earrings shaped like windows;
Clicking sounds of fingers after recitals of words;
And green, purple, blue letters inscribed on our poems.

They are like engineers for *Art Nouveau*³ drawings, coach our inner
eyes
To build poems youthful as streamlined trainers in orange
And sweep clear our poetic windows with boisterous whistles of
words.

Tina CHENG Ting-ting

2 Henri Matisse is a French artist and a leader of the Fauvist movement (art).

3 Art Nouveau is an art movement which reached its peak of popularity at the beginning of the 20th century. Its works are characterized by the presence of intricate curving lines.

Rainy Night Runs On

City submerged by sounds of the rain, tinkle of silver earrings enters from corners, bounces itself between rigid steel walls, dilating like a balloon. A black lady in long silver dress floats in. On the shiny silk glue-like raindrops stick. Drooping garment energized amid running motions of legs. Squares of soaked lawns create squishing sounds out of her paces. No trees, no porches, no tunnels. Not one shelter for the lady is available. This does not matter as the sparrows are also resting alfresco with wetted feathers. But the lady has no idea she has been circling the city, as if it was a racetrack, leaving behind trails of silver lines dripped from her hems.

Tina CHENG Ting-ting



Lo Tsz Wah, Eva

It was Mrs. Koo's first time to visit Guangzhou. She arrived at the train station 30 minutes earlier than the departure time. Once the door opened, she couldn't help dashing into the first-class carriage and taking the seat in the very corner, which was next to the window; for fear that she would miss some important things; for fear that somebody she knew would discover her journey and for fear that somebody would find out the reason why she was visiting Guangzhou.

"Madam, may I have your ticket?" The train conductor asked.

Then Mrs. Koo handed in her ticket, without even having a glimpse of him.

"Thank you very much, Madam. Enjoy your journey," the conductor said politely.

However, she didn't hear it as she was delving into the photograph, in which a young woman was holding a little boy in her arms. Their smiles show that both of them must be very happy at that moment. Who was that woman? Who was that kid? Did the woman have a relationship with her husband? The answer was explicit. If she didn't how come her photo could be found in his wallet? No! She should trust Mr. Koo! He loved her. Though he had to work in Guangzhou, every weekend he would come back to Hong Kong. It was impossible for him to have a Yi Laiz¹! The most important thing was he had died and it was useless to know if he had an affair...

"No! I shouldn't have wasted my time and money on searching for that woman's address! I was destined to find that photo, I was destined to go there and I was destined to have a battle with that woman..." Mrs. Koo held the picture tightly while biting her fingernails, an an-

1 Yi Lai: In Chinese, it means mistress

cient habit, which she had once forgiven.

It took 2 hours from Hong Kong to Guangzhou. However, the journey was far longer than 2 hours; it took Mrs. Koo ages to reach this foreign place. Although she had never been Guangzhou, strangely, she could smell a familiar scent, the lost scent, the buried scent, which finally led her to Chan Kee.

Chan Kee was an unnoticeable, small and run-down restaurant situated in one of the poorest districts in Guangzhou. It was not easy for outsiders to locate the restaurant, unless they had got the address from residents living there.

Mrs. Koo pushed the door open. Then a woman with a bright smile came out from the kitchen and was ready to wait on her. Mrs. Koo could recognize that she was the woman whom she was so desperate to find; the down-to-earth woman with the most ordinary appearance was much more scrawny than in the photograph. Her skimpy dress, which was an unknown brand-name product, was a great contrast with Mrs. Koo's Vivienne Westwood dress.

Mrs. Koo ordered a bowl of Wonton noodles and the woman soon delivered it from the kitchen. The woman didn't know Mrs. Koo, as if Mrs. Koo was merely a customer. Mrs. Koo glanced around the restaurant and found a piece of yellowed newspaper cutting pasted on the wall. The Headline was: Chan Kee- the Third generation. The photo in the newspaper showed an old man, a man of middle age and the woman, who were holding up the cuisines. It reminded her of her aged father.....

The aspiration of Mrs. Koo's father was to let his daughter carry on his toy business in Hong Kong. When Mrs. Koo was freshly graduated from the university, she was recruited to work in her father's company. She first worked as a salesperson, then a sales executive and



further promoted to be the vice-chairman. However, ten years later, when the company was making great profits, she suddenly decided to leave the company, in spite of her family's opposition. As a result, there was a tense argument in Mrs. Koo's family and finally led to her broken relationship with her father. Even though it was a long time ago, up till now she still couldn't realize why her father was so angry. He should be pleased as his daughter had an aspiration to establish her own company; he should be proud as his daughter was as brave as men to take risks and face challenges; he should be happy he had such a bright daughter.

"Chan Kee was my family's business. It was my Grandpa's treasure, my Pa's treasure and mine!" The woman said with her gentle smile and came to Mrs. Koo.

"Mainland girl, her future is bounded by her family!" Mrs. Koo whispered while squeezing out a smile on her face.

"How is the Wonton noodle?" The woman asked.

"Umm...it's kind of delicious...But...how come the restaurant was run for three generations and still was such a petite one."

"Ha-ha...Thank you! I'm glad to know you like it! Well, I haven't thought of expanding the business. Maybe... the aim of running Chan Kee is to commemorate my Pa and Grandpa instead of running it for money." The woman answered with a sense of sadness when speaking of her Pa and Grand Pa. Then she continued,

"Whenever I worked in Chan Kee, I could feel my Pa as if he is still alive. You know, my Pa and Grandpa had passed away. What they left is Chan Kee; as a daughter, it is my responsibility to look after their treasure."

"Women should have their own life. You should be responsible for your own life and not for others." Mrs. Koo asserted. She couldn't

believe such a traditional woman was able to exist in this world. That's why she was still selling Wonton noodles, why she was defeated by her and could only be a Yi Lai.

"I don't see running Chan Kee was merely a responsibility! What I mean is, whenever I work here, I feel my Pa's existence as if he was still alive." The woman explained with her smile full of contentment.

Mrs. Koo looked up and smiled sarcastically. Then a little kid ran towards the woman. It was the kid that was shown in the photo! The happy kid seemed to look like Mr. Koo in certain extent; they both had a pair of dark black eyes, which were full of sincerity.

"Ma...May I play football with Ah Keung outside?" The kid asked. His gaze was somehow familiar.

"Okay! Be careful, boy." The woman smiled and patted his little head gently.

The woman was quite young, as least much younger than Mrs. Koo. She seemed to be about 30 but she had already got a 6-year old child. Mrs. Koo should have one, but it was never too easy. To her, giving birth to a child was a large investment. The investment was not merely referred to finance but also time. At that time she was totally immersed into setting up her own business and would not be able to distribute her time on a little life. However, unfortunately or fortunately, Mrs. Koo got pregnant accidentally. When she got the news, she hid it from Mr. Koo and secretly went to U.S. to abort the little life, by claiming that she had to work overseas for a month. It was never easy to murder, but if she did give birth to the child, she would surely not a good mother. Why should she start an investment, which was destined to lose, was destined to let the child suffers, was destined to ruin her business?

"That naughty boy love playing football as his father does. Every-



day afternoon, he played football with his father.” The woman said.

“Mr. Koo loved playing football? How come I don’t know?” Mrs. Koo thought. How long had the woman been with Mr. Koo? It must be less than 10 years, but she thoroughly knew Mr. Koo better than Mrs. Koo did. It was not surprising that she did not know Mr. Koo’s favorite. Although they had had been living together for 10 years, they had not spoken 9 sentences to each other.

“My husband is very busy. He has to travel to Hong Kong every weekend, especially during public holidays. And he hasn’t come back since last month.....Sometimes I doubted if he had a Yi Lai in Hong Kong. Ha-ha.” The women laughed with a sense of bitterness.

“But, it doesn’t matter; I understand that men should focus on their career. Even if he has got a Yi Lai, I won’t mind as long as he knows when to come back home. You know, Men are birds without legs.” The woman continued. Her eyes showed a sense of sorrow.

The woman’s ignorance towards Mr. Koo’s death and towards her own identity as a Yi Lai had finally ignited Mrs. Koo’s fire.

“Have you thought that may be you are the Yi Lai?” Mrs. Koo asked.

“Ha.....are you kidding? I know you Hong Kong women often believe women from mainland are Yi Lai, please don’t stereotype us.” The woman rebuked.

“But now I don’t think about it. I have a son, he represents my husband. Men’s life is career; women’s life is child.”

It was Mrs. Koo’s usual practice to further bite her prey and attack it until it could no longer struggle. Unexpectedly, this time she did not. Maybe the woman was no longer her prey; in certain extent, they were kind of the same. They shared the same man, they were deceived and they were woman. The profound sentence “Men’s life is career;

women's life is child." was still lingering in Mrs. Koo's ears as if it was a lullaby. Then a woman's voice suddenly broke into the air.

"Mrs. Koo!"

Mrs. Koo turned around and doubted if anyone knew her in this foreign place, which she had never been. It was fat Si Lai² carrying lots of plastic bags, which are full of vegetables, meat, fish.....and the watery blood of the meat was dripping out from the plastic bags. It was impossible for Mrs. Koo to know such Si Lai!

"I want a bowl of Wonton noodles take-away!" The Si Lai continued.

"Okay!" The woman answered, again with her gentle smile.

Wait...What happened? Was there something wrong with Mrs. Koo's ears? The woman was Mrs. Koo? She was the Yi Lai only and should not have the surname of Mr. Koo. Their relationship was secret and illegal! Was that true? At that time, Mrs. Koo tried very hard to think out some reasons to persuade herself that she knew that Si Lai. She wondered if she was in a nightmare, a horrible yet vivid nightmare. Suddenly, Mrs. Koo's mind blanked out. She was completely lost and it took her almost 5 minutes to try to figure out what had happened. Then she gradually remembered something, some important thing that she had missed out for ages.....

On that Saturday night, Mr. Koo and Mrs. Koo had their dinner by the candlelight at the Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong Hotel. Then, Mr. Koo, with his sincere dark black eyes, proposed to Mrs. Koo with a bunch of her favorite red roses and a sparkling diamond ring.

"Louis, thank your very much. But I haven't thought ofgetting married." Mrs. Koo said.

"Why? We have been with each other since we were in University. Lizzie, you should know that I really love you. Or.....you don't love

2 Si Lai: In Chinese means housewife.



me?” Mr. Koo could not understand.

“No! No! I love you too. But it doesn’t mean that we have to get married. It is not necessary to prove our love through marriage.”

“I don’t mean to prove our love through marriage. But marriage surely marks our future. It represents another stage of our lives and our relationship. It also forms a new family that links up our families. My parents love you.....”

“Our love is between us and not related to our family members! We don’t need their blessings or recognition. The idea of linking up families through marriage is a cliché! In this modern society, woman is an individual and should not be owned by their husband. I am Elizabeth Wong and why should I change my surname into yours.” Mrs. Koo argued.

Perhaps Mrs. Koo was too agitated; she drew the attention of all the waiters and customers. Mr. Koo did not say anything; instead, he drank the glass of water. Mrs. Koo knew she must have got on Mr. Koo’s nerves because she could see that Mr. Koo’s sincere eyes had turned to be ignoring ones.

“Sorry, Louis. I love you very much, it’s true. I just want to say that Marriage is nothing but a certificate. I don’t want our relationship to be bounded by law and order.” Mrs. Koo tried to put out the fire.

So...Mr. Koo’s offer of marriage had turned into an argument and further into a negotiation. Finally, they both reached a concession that they cohabitated. However, their neighbors often treated them as a married couple. Every time when the neighbors came across them, they would address them as Mr. and Mrs. Koo. As time passed, Mrs. Koo, even though she was once firmly refused to be named as “Koo”, had gradually accepted that surname.

What it meant was, throughout these years, it was Mrs. Koo as-

sumed herself as Mrs. Koo- the “Queen”! It was Mrs. Koo who had an illegal relationship with Mr. Koo; it was she who did not have the right to own the surname of Koo; it was she who was the Yi Lai instead. What she saw in front of her was the woman, the real “Mrs. Koo”! Without finishing the Wonton noodles, without looking at anybody, without uttering a single word, Mrs. Koo put down a \$ 50 note on the table and left quietly.

It rained heavily outside Chan Kee, despite the sun was shining and it was unspeakably stuffy. The rains hit on Mrs. Koo’s face and her mascara bled blackened tears. It was hard to distinguish whether they were rain or tears.

All of a sudden, a football crashed into Mrs. Koo’s stomach. It was Lok Lok, who kicked the ball.

“Sorry, auntie... Are you okay?” Lok Lok asked.

Mrs. Koo gently touched his curly hair and looked into his pair of dark black eyes. She saw a little woman standing in a complete darkness and staring at her with a familiar gaze. Then she wiped off the blackened tears and said,

“I’m okay. I have not yet owned anything.”

After Marianne Moore's "The Mind Is an Enchanting Thing"

is nothing more than a machine called brain
pre-installed in an organ
like a durian

wrapped by the spine-haired shell
to sell the power of its smell.

Like a Sumo pounding on Ali¹;

like the disconnected Net;
like short circuit or traffic
congestion

 jammed as the mind oxidized
 under the exposure of Time,
contaminated by the Virus spreading world wide.

An infant mind has no wire-gauze
to snare memory; unless, once
the stipulated programme runs
 automatically, the spider web
 spewed to mingle the soul
with the reminiscence sowed.

It is a device which mice haven't got.
Logic—wisdom,
sensation—love and odium,
 can prosper in the mind

1 Muhammad Ali was the heavyweight boxing champion

when parents insert coins to
actuate the babies' device. It

is like essence oil of aromatherapy
refilling the empty fuel tank;
like the swallow feeds larvae
with its beak.

The blank-slate is no longer blank
unless—

Freud said,
“it cannot be
formatted again,
until
your
death.”

Christine LEUNG Mei-yee

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Literature

I

Solidified words float downstream
In the turbulence of my mind.
Inflorescent spooondrift sparkles,
Flourishes
In the ocean of Literature.

II

Literature is not a piece of dead meat
Or a pool of stagnant water.

III

Literature is born to be
The art of ego.
Joy,
Fear,
Anger,
Grief,
Desire,
Compassion,
Too many vague emotions spin.

IV

In an auction over Literature,
While scientists, economists bargain with a shilling,

An illiterate bids a house of diamonds.

V

To: Mr. and Ms. Critic,
Did Literature offend you?
Why do you sharpen your sword?
To chop its body into pieces
For investigation?
I know not.
Regards,
I, with a question mark.

VI

In his first lecture,
Professor Huddart asked our English Majors,
What is Literature?
Pale countenance flooded at that juncture.
Oh! Don't worry. Literary Criticism may help
You decode its secret, my dear majors.

VII

I demanded the publishers a bare ground for
The Garden of Literature where I can see
Masterpieces embroidered on an oak tree
Waiting to grow,
To die.

VIII

One day,

A symposium for Literature scholars from all over the world came
Under the oak tree. Plato argued,
“Poets are liars.
Literature disorders the *Republic*.”
Shakespeare yelled, “To be or not to be.”
Mencius hesitated, “The ambivalence between Republic and Literature
Resembles fish or bear’s paw¹...”
No wonder, bear’s paw.

IX

Keep on
Reading plus writing;
Writing minus thinking;
Thinking times imagining;
Imagining over creating.
So, creation is the answer for the productive formula of Literature.

X

I wrote. I write:
Writer writes writings?
Or writings write writers?
I wrote. I write—
Without a drop of black ink.

XI

No flowery diction in the bed of my garden
Beautifies Literature, glorifies Literature.
Alas! I could not help to leave it in a dry spring.

1 Mencius had suggested in his famous metaphor about Chinese morality, “Fish is what I want while bear’s paw is also what I want; if I can’t have two together, I will choose bear’s paw. To stay alive is what I want; to maintain morality is also what I want; if I can’t maintain both of them together, I will choose morality instead of life.”

XII

To Whom It May Concern,
You're assured that
The dissection of Literature will never be finished.
We need them for cash and fame. Forgive us.
Best wishes,
Veteran Critics.

XIII

You're lacerated and bruised all over,
All over. Certified—
Name: Literature
Rebirth date: a false foreseeable future.

Christine LEUNG Mei-yee

Mirror

Au Yeung Viona

...The master of lightness and delicacy is not me, but her. When I danced, I felt a tension in me, a tension between reserve and passion. But she danced to the voice of her heart, in which the qualities of lightness and delicacy had begun to ripen...

Luna shuffled in her pointe shoes on the stage. Occasionally she paused, and looked through a thin, transparent sheet of curtain separating herself and Stella. On the other side of the curtain, Stella played her role as the mirror image of Luna. She moved swiftly at exactly the same time as Luna moved, so at ease that even herself would doubt if any effort had been put to achieve such a perfect imitation.

‘Stella.’ The plain music stopped and the dim light was turned bright as the director spoke in his assertive tone. ‘Stella. Remember in this scene we’re showing the slightly distorted image of Luna. So I want you to vary your style a bit. Don’t completely imitate Luna.’ Stella nodded, fixing her eyes on the floor. ‘Yea. We’re the same, yet different,’ Luna added with her hands folded. Stella looked up and stared at her proud smile. An air of arrogance puffed from her mouth every time a word was uttered...

9th August

Today when we were doing the ‘mirror’ scene I was told not to imitate Luna completely. I have to say I’ve made a mistake. Two months ago when the script was in my hands I was so excited that they picked

me as the supporting dancer of Luna. I had long been impressed by the lightness and delicacy in her steps. I didn't even care to read the other details, including the 'distorted image' part, of course, because I was just focusing on the same steps that I'd have with Luna. But Luna's words today are really making my heart ache. She's trying to keep a distance from me, and doesn't seem to like my close imitation at all. Perhaps she's afraid next year I may replace her as the leading dancer. Well, by the time she said those words I really did want to shake her style off from my steps. But how am I to do this? I tried not to look at her when I danced. I tried to forget I was the mirror image. I changed my pointe shoes from the brand 'Freed' to 'Capizzio'. But still when I stood on my toe and turned, Luna's unique spirit crept onto my toe and swirled around my body.

Stella

'Look! Her hair style goes well with her dress. You think so?' Each of Stella's friends was busy with her hair, her make-up, the ribbon on her dress.

'Thanks, Sheenie.' Stella said in a flat tone. Her vague smile in the mirror reflected into her eyes, the only medium between the faint mirror image and her blank mind, in which a voice emerged, 'so this is Stella, a creature of fantasy'. Stella began to be engulfed in a feeling of disdain. She struggled to search within herself for something that entirely belonged to her, but failed. The expression in her eyes, her smile, the way she tied her shoe ribbons, the lightness her steps carried...all were shadowed by Luna's qualities.

Luna and Stella matched well as usual in their dance. The two got closer to each other. Luna stood on her toes, facing the curtain. She clung to it with her right hand reaching out, touching her own mirror image. Stella did the same at the other side of the curtain. But as her hand was about to touch Luna's, Luna's words appeared in her mind – 'we're the same, yet different'. She remembered the proud smile of Luna. She remembered the air of arrogance which seemed to puff out from Luna's mouth as she spoke. These seemed to convince her that it was wrong to imitate Luna. Would Luna be grateful to see somebody copying her? No. She would just look down on this false copy and despise every step and gesture it made.

So Stella held her hand back. She was fixing her eyes on the floor, instead of looking straight into Luna's eyes as instructed.

Stella and Luna skipped away from each other and stood still on both edges of the stage with their heads lowered and their upper back curved. The lights dimmed and the grey curtain dropped. The audience clapped as a matter of fact, as if to cover the wrong step Stella just made. They preferred a perfect show.

11th August

When I went back to the back stage after the performance, Sheenie tapped on my shoulder and said 'it doesn't matter'. I said 'thanks', but actually I didn't care if my Ballet coach was coming to give me a good scold. I was in a calm state of mind. The happiness of triumph even stole through my heart. I was secretly praising myself to have finally acted out a distorted image of Luna, not by varying her style, but by a real step. Yes. Luna was right. 'We are the same, yet different.' And Stella proved it.

Stella

A music of guitar played. In the practice hall of the Ballet school, Luna stood at the centre, her arms raised to her shoulders and her fingers curled. She lifted her head with her eyes closed, as if she was letting the notes of the tune sprinkle over her face. Every muscle of her arms moved along with the beats of drum. She stepped out, and to Stella's surprise, Luna clapped coarsely on her thighs. She swung away her right arm to the right, and her lowered head to the left. Vitality and pride seemed to burst out from every part of her body. Stella could not stand such extraordinary movements. What was this dance? Was this not Luna, the Queen of Lightness and Delicacy?

'What're you doing here?' The deep breath Stella had just taken caught Luna's attention. Stella could not say a word. She could just stare at Luna as she heard Luna's stern voice.

'Don't you tell anyone about the Flamenco.'

'Why?'

'Lightness. Delicacy. These are what they expect from me. I'm not going to disappoint them.'

'But why not reveal your passion and wildness in Ballet? Maybe it'll add new elements to your performance. Who knows.'

'They've spent years shaping me into such a lovable figure in Ballet. Everybody likes Luna. Everybody looks up to Luna. She's a queen, a butterfly, a sylph. You name it. You think they'll still accept me if they discover I'm actually passionate and wild?'

'I wouldn't fake others out if I were you. You can't fake yourself out, can you?'

'Do you think you're being true to yourself and others with all the imitations of me?'

'It won't happen again, after that performance. I'm fed up with it,

and now I've found out the truth.' Stella walked away without looking back. There were no forces inside luring her to look back at Luna, as it used to be. She couldn't believe such determination.

There in a garden Stella was sitting on her own. She could smell fragrance in the evening breeze. She stood up and looked around, but she could not find out where the fragrance came from. Perhaps it was from the small white flowers, which Luna said were called osmanthus. The fragrance did help a little to calm her down, but her fantasy of Luna being a delicate sylph juxtaposed with the real Luna burning with passion. Stella's heart started to lose its weight and float, light as the petals of a dandelion in the air being blown away from their root.

15th August

I'm totally lost. I tried to escape from all my thoughts through dancing in the practice hall, but failed. I began to doubt who the reflection in the mirror was. It was not the imitation of Luna that I had been proud of anymore. It was an artificially posed statue without flesh, hollow. I turned away from the mirror in horror and got back to my dance. But as soon as the music 'The Maiden's Prayer' played, I discovered that I've lost the ability to create. The three months of practice have grinded down my original qualities considered as an obstruction to the performance. And now the casualness and directness I used to have in my steps are nowhere to find. I tried hard to get away from my light and delicate steps. Once I almost succeeded in forgetting Luna, but as I opened my arms and brought my right arm in front of my chest, I saw my middle finger, slightly curved downward. Then I knew I lost.

Luna was back again.

Stella

‘I decided long ago...never to walk in anyone’s shadow...if I fail...’

Stella and Sheenie were sitting in a tea shop. ‘Hey. Aren’t you used to have brown sugar in your lemon water?’ said the ever-sensitive Sheenie in her curious voice.

‘Oh yes.’ Stella put down the pack of white sugar and picked the brown one. ‘Do you think I’m lacking character?’ she inquired.

‘It’ll be over soon. That’s normal for actors and actresses. They take some time to get away from the roles they’ve played for a number of months.’

‘Well, maybe...But you know, it’s scary. Sometimes I tried desperately to find the style that I’ve lost, but when I’ve failed and picked up Luna’s style again, I’ve found peace.’

‘You like Luna very much, don’t you?’

‘I have to say that I do. She knows that, but apparently she doesn’t care.’

‘Stella. Are you going to Luna’s farewell party? I’m sure you will, huh?’ asked Sheenie.

‘Farewell party? Where’s she going?’ Stella’s heart couldn’t help beating fast when she heard news about Luna.

‘Europe.’

‘For what?’

‘Not sure. Why don’t you ask her? You two were partners.’

Luna looked different in her red T-shirt and jeans. Two ballet coaches were beside her, probably talking about Luna's journey. One of the coaches suddenly burst into laughter. Luna just giggled, her proud smile still on her face. Stella was keeping her eyes on Luna, her hands holding a full glass of orange juice. She wished to join them badly, and found out why Luna had to go. But the past held her back – Luna's proud smile, her attempt to distance herself from Stella, and the most important thing – Stella's promise not to imitate Luna anymore. Stella hated those disgusting words of praise for her being like Luna. She hated those!

Stella turned. She was about to walk away without looking back, but this time she couldn't. She turned her head and gazed at Luna. Those days when they used to be the same, the evening when she first knew Luna through Flamenco...all these she couldn't let go.

Luna was attracted to Stella's eyes. The proud smile had disappeared from Luna's face. Her eyes were filled with sorrow, and seemed to reflect streams of thoughts in her mind she had not yet figured out.

20th August

Finally it has come to Luna's farewell party. I didn't plan to say anything to her. I thought if I was forced to say something I'd probably say something like 'have a safe journey'. She wouldn't care anyway. The best thing was for me to slip away without being noticed. At the party, I planned to leave without looking back, and failed as expected. But this time was different. Luna noticed me gazing at her. Perhaps I shouldn't accord so much importance to this, which we had practised

for a thousand times – looking back towards each other when the other was doing the same. It has become an instinct. But I couldn't explain for the sadness in Luna's eyes.

'Which book are you looking for?' Sheenie asked as she looked at Stella flipping through a travel book with colourful pictures of Europe. She supposed Stella came with a purpose.

'Just looking around. Where do you think Luna is at the moment?' Stella paused at a page on which a gondola drifted pass a canal under the greasy sunshine. The boatman's pole did little to sweep away the haze.

'In Italy. Sitting in a gondola perhaps. Ya?'

'You know me, Sheenie,' Stella smiled. Of course she took Sheenie's words as a joke, but she hoped they were true too, so she'd be able to trace Luna's footprints.

'Hey! Look at that.'

...

In the practice hall Stella and her friends are practising as usual. Stella stands on her toe and turned. Now she can do 4 and a half turns.

'Well done, Stella! It's almost a year and you still turn like Luna,' yells June who is tying her hair into a messy bun in the corner.

'Do I?' Stella looks at herself in the mirror as she answer casually. She discovers her shoe ribbons have loosened. She knees down on her right knee, places the front flat part of her pointe shoes on the floor, lowers her head and starts tying the ribbons. She makes a cross with

the ribbons, and circles them above her ankle. She ties a knot finally.

14th February

Haven't written a diary for a long time. Life changes a lot without Luna. It's not an easy task to develop my own style without a model. I'm still not sure where I'm going with my dance, but I know Luna's style has become part of mine (It took me quite a while to free myself from the constraint of her style). June said I was still like Luna, and I admitted this with a contented heart, without feeling offended or extremely happy. When I knelt down and finished tying my shoe ribbons, I smiled secretly to myself. I never tuck the rest of the ribbon in, nor does Luna.

Stella

...I will remember her, a girl whose light shines on the unseen place in my heart. That is why I am here, waiting to explore a kind of dance that liberates my true character.

written on Dec 22 in Spain
by Luna, a professional dancer

The Tragedy of an Avant-Garde

It was dawn. My mother got up and prepared breakfast.
On the table, sunlight slanted against a
loaf of bread. Gently, my mother brushed a layer of tuna
on one piece,
and then paved some strips of cabbage.

Fragmented black shadows skimmed over;
a platoon of sparrows guarded a handrail outside,
avidly cast their eyes on the prey—

Shimmering cubes of ice floated on a cup of milk tea,
multiple reflections like mirrors opposing each other.
The birds stared at the profile of the tuna sandwich:
Flesh of a foe, lawless as Don Quixote's giant.

But no one moved. It was not the right time.
Some exchanged a look. It was mistak—en—

Swoosh! An avant-garde thrust ahead—
dashed against the window.

Pow!

A free falling body landed on the ground.

They hesitated to tremble; they blinked, clouded
two droplets of embedded black granite;
Salute to our Colonel, the great militarist.

Charlie NG Chak-kwan

Homecoming

I followed a path led by the morning sun;
 Downstairs, scent of steamed buns was oozing—
 The steamer on the stove burped and I watched
 A waft of vapour ascended to the high ceiling.

Waiting for the sweet potato soup grandma was preparing,
 I gazed through the narrow door opened to a rice field. Two
 Farmers bent down and planted green rice shoots.

“Guyu¹ is coming, nice time to plant the saplings.”

The air smelled of moist spring soil and ox dung;
 Distant clinking of rusty bike and coarse greetings
 Dispersed—I got a sip of the soup. Two chickens
 Wandered into the kitchen; I threw them a fistful of corn.

*“Tomorrow is the celebration for the Village Deity,
 he will bless this year’s weather and harvest.”*

In the backyard, I heard a donkey’s hee-haw:
 He was turning a stone mill. I sniggered when I saw
 The red radish moving in front of his head.

“Girl, come. Have some more. Buns are ready.”

I strolled back to the wooden round table. Steamed buns’
 Contour exuded mist of white-sugar sweetness. Immersed

1 A solar term in the Chinese calendar, which means “grain rains” in English. Approximately on 20 April.

In pigs' oinking and the burbling of a water wheel, I
munched on a bun and
all those rustic rhymes recalled my bygone Springs.

Charlie NG Chak-kwan

It's My Life

May Chan

Sometimes I think that no one is really capable of understanding me. I always wonder whether it is just me, or whether the same is true for everyone else. My parents did not understand me, and neither did my colleagues, my friends, or my wife Shirley. No, ex-wife I should say. She filed for a divorce.

I found out about her infidelity with a man called Pete.

I'm sorry—I made up that name. I don't even know his real name. I have never even seen him. But I just wanted to include a name to characterize him, to substantiate the fact that it was he who took her away from me. In fact, Shirley never even bothered to tell me who he was. And perhaps it's better this way. When we divorced, she was still convinced that I had never loved her.

I won't go into the rather dreadful details of how I found out about their relationship. But after she left, I found myself in an abyss of suffering, a void in which nothing could ever live. There was no substance to anything, no substance to what I did, what I thought. Even my body no longer seemed part of me anymore. I don't remember how I made it through that period. I tried to talk to Tyler, my best friend. But he didn't understand.

As with the most catastrophic of natural disasters, there were omens foreseeing its coming. I was just too conceited to heed them. But after the calamity one knows what those signs were. An ocean that curiously retreats back, restless animals that flee to higher ground for shelter, the mysterious tranquillity that sweeps over a landscape and paralyses the trees, its branches and its leaves, the bushes and the flowers. All these signs add up, and at hindsight, they were yelling out

at you:

“How could you fail to see us?”

Her inattentiveness, lack of concern, indifference, in a mere rolling of the eyes, a slightly too forced smile, a brief impatient crossing of the arms, a minute rise in the pitch of her voice. Signs that I could have noticed, but failed to. Perhaps I was not the only one who was not being understood.

After our divorce, I took Chinese ink painting lessons to while away some of the time that I used to spend with Shirley. I intended for them to keep my mind occupied, to prevent myself from being dragged recurrently in an endless whirl of suffering. At the beginning, I was merely physically present. There was no soul in anything that I did, let alone the works that I painted. I was living in my own world.

However, the lessons gradually turned into a source of comfort that I came to look forward to. The somewhat fusty smell of the old walls and the delightfully pungent scent of Chinese black ink constituted a familiar haven which I felt safe to retreat into. And in my own paintings, I would always be able to find mental space in which to hide, with no need to confront the cruelties of the real world. I loved the fact that we used black ink, and was only too eager to paint on the white sheets of Xuan paper with thick strokes of dense ink, filling voids, erasing emptiness. With each new painting it seemed I was starting something anew, and I appreciated each blank slate on which I could pour out my own feelings.

Yet, there was another reason why my appreciation for Chinese painting class grew. It was Jeanette. I still remember the first time she addressed me, the first time anyone had spoken to me in a long time.

“I don’t want to criticize you,” her voice came from behind, “but you don’t seem to grasp the essence of Chinese ink painting, do

you?"

She could not hold back her smile and revealed two neat rows of brilliant teeth, as she examined the aimless pattern of strokes that were supposed to constitute a forest of bamboo.

"I'm sorry?" I woke up from my trance.

"Chinese ink painting is about economy of strokes, or as our master often says 'the art of leaving blank.'"

I had never paid much attention to what our master said, and followed merely half of the instructions.

"Thank you," I said, confused.

She returned to her seat, two desks away on my right. It was then that I looked at her face and recognized her. She had been one of the students in ballroom dance class, which I used to attend with my wife. I had a recollection of having been assigned as her partner, when my wife couldn't make it to class. I had never been good at dancing, and it had been to satisfy my wife that I went. But Jeanette took it seriously. I remember how, taking my hand, her body had directed every step I made. At first I had felt uncomfortable, but it was not long before I let her lead, and just let myself go. It was as if I could entrust this stranger with my whole life.

She did not seem to recognize me, nor remember our first encounter. And I was completely contented with that. However, from that time on, I began to pay more attention to her paintings. Hers were very different from mine. They somehow seemed to be alive, whether what she drew was a butterfly, a goldfish, or a few branches of bamboo. How did she accomplish that? I often wondered.

Then I began to notice the way she held her brush, the flexible motion of her wrist, the coordination of her arm, the hand she lightly rested on the paper with which to pivot her body, her inclined head,

the engrossed expression on her face, and the fixation of her eyes on nothing but her own painting. I started to become intrigued by her single-mindedness, her unwavering attention and determination, and the intensity of love that she instilled in her work.

One day, I was at the studio early, and found it empty. I walked to the cupboard to take out my painting tools, and then to the drying rack to find my work. As I took it from the rack, one of the paintings caught my eyes. It was Jeanette's. Our master had shown us Bai Juyi's "Swallow Poem," as well as some other poems the week before, and Jeanette had decided to paint an allusion to the former.

I imagined how Jeanette lightly drew out the ink with the tip of her brush into the sharp, pointed tips of the wings and tails of the swallows, and then blurred the ink with a wet brush into fuzzy streaks of feathers and fluffy fur on their breasts. The small swallow held its head up high, ready for an adventurous soar into the sky. A bigger swallow, neck extended eagerly after the little swallow, stood on a single tree branch near its nest.

"You like my painting?" her voice startled me, and my heart began to pound frantically.

"I'm sorry, I only—"

"That's alright, no need to excuse yourself. I grant you all right to admire my painting." She smiled one of her brilliant smiles.

"Yes, I like your painting." I couldn't help grinning too. Partly out of embarrassment, partly because of her contagious smile.

"You know," she said, looking at the painting, "when I had Bai Juyi's poem in mind, I wanted to show the moment when the young swallow flew away from its mother." She scanned over her brush strokes, as if to make sure each is working to constitute the whole picture.

“Why?” I asked her.

She looked from the mother swallow, to the small one.

“It’s because that’s the moment when the mother comes to realize that she cannot hold on to her young forever, that the little swallow will go out into the world, mature, and pursue a happy life of its own.”

She looked from the painting to me. I dared not look her in the eyes.

“And oftentimes, the same applies for people,” she added. “If you know they will be happier without you, it’s time to let them go. No need to hold back onto the past. No reason for sorrow.”

With that she walked back to the table with me, and those last words resounded in my mind. *No need to hold back onto the past. No reason for sorrow.*

From that time on, she moved to the desk next to mine, and often taught me about the philosophy behind Chinese painting, but also life in general. Every moment with her was awe-inspiring, enchanting and delightful. Her mere presence would fill my whole life with meaning and purpose, a feeling that I hadn’t had since my divorce. And the unnervingly taut feeling that had gripped my heart recurrently ever since divorce somehow found its way of release.

I remember one day we were having dinner in a Shanghainese restaurant on Nathan Road. It was a small restaurant, with an open kitchen that looked out on the street. I watched how the cook was preparing dough for Siu Lung Bao, kneading it into a ball, and drawing it out again.

“I’ve been thinking of what you last said to me about the swallows,” I said, as I watched the monotonous motion.

“Oh, really?” She took a sip from her tea. “Tell me.”

“I really should let go of the past,” I stared into my tea cup, “and

go on with life.”

“Could I be of any help?” she pretended to sound businesslike.

“Yes. I suppose you can,” I said, smiling, yet at the same time struggling to find the words. “I—I was married to a woman. And—
...”

“You loved her?”

“Yes, of course I did.”

“Did she love you?”

“I suppose that’s the question. Did she love me?” I shrugged. “I guess she didn’t. She ran off with another guy.”

“I would’ve if I were her,” she said, dead-serious.

“You would?”

“Of course I would. Who would want to be married to a bore like you?” She frowned.

“Really?”

My heart sank there and then.

“But you’re lucky. I’m a bore, like you are, and so I will not leave you to sit alone at this table looking like a droopy old fool.” She smiled. I smiled too. We had a lovely evening together, Jeanette and I. I learnt that she had gone through very much the same kind of ordeal as I had, which drew us even closer together. Jeanette understood me.

Three months later, I proposed to her, and she accepted.

After we were engaged for two months, I took Jeanette to meet my parents. I had praised her so much that they couldn’t wait to see her for themselves.

I still remember the way they looked as I stepped into the flat holding Jeanette’s hand.

“Oh, hello. Nice to meet you,” said my mother, examining Jeanette

from top to bottom. Then she exchanged looks with my father, who had been doing the same. Jeanette was wearing a beige-coloured smart-casual suit, a slight tinge of make-up, and had her hair up in a chic chignon.

It remained quiet for a moment, until my father finally spoke.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Nice to meet you, was it...Jeanette?”

“Yes,” Jeanette smiled, “That’s me. Thank you for inviting me to dinner.”

We sat down at the dinner table, and my mother served the dishes. The atmosphere was tense, and my parents only spoke out of necessity. Apart from the customary polite formalities of inviting the guest to enjoy the dishes and drink some more of the nourishing soup, and the equally polite replies from Jeanette, there was not much of a conversation going on.

“They don’t like me very much, do they?” Jeanette carefully inquired, after we had left the flat.

“Don’t worry, my dear. I’m sure they like you alright.” It was more what I myself hoped for than that it was a reassurance to Jeanette.

The definitive disapproval came in the form of a phone call.

“Son, we need to talk,” my father’s voice came from the other side of the line.

Probably, he had been urged to phone me by my mother, and she was wiretapping through another line. He never took the initiative in such things.

“It’s about Jeanette, isn’t it?”

“You’re quick of understanding, son. Yes, it’s about Jeanette.”

“So, what do the two of you think of her?”

“Well, let me tell you what I think of her,” my mother replied. My

guess was correct.

“Your father and I don’t like her at all. Are you after the money? Listen, son, if you need money—”

“Mom, I’m *not* after her money. She’s not that rich, and—”

“That’s even worse. What do you *see* in her?”

“I like her for what she is, and I’m sure you’ll like her too if you get to know her better. After all, you’ve seen her only once.”

“And thank you, once is enough. I do not wish to see her again.”

“Mom, listen. She’s a wonderful woman—”

“Don’t call me ‘mom’ if you insist upon being with her!” she snarled.

“Mom.”

“It’s either she or me. End of discussion.”

“Dad.”

“You don’t need to ask for his opinion. He agrees with me. End of discussion.”

And with that she hung up. Yet, the line was still alive.

“Dad?”

“Son, I know it’s a hard time for you.” My father sounded apologetic. “But I do think your mother has a point there. Don’t make a mess of your life. You’ve made enough of a mess already. Take care.” And he hung up too.

Perhaps I should’ve seen it coming. But still, I felt enraged. What was wrong with them? Why couldn’t they accept Jeanette the way they did Shirley? It’s not that I ever liked to compare people, but if I had to—I would admit that Shirley was physically more attractive, to most people, however, her beauty was incomparable to that of Jeanette’s. Jeanette did not need a nice dress and fancy make-up to look glamorous. It was all in her. Her sense of humour, her intelligence, her

love for nature and loyalty to things she believed in. And I loved her for all she was. Yet, my parents didn't care.

I hadn't seen Tyler in months, almost a year, when he phoned to ask me out for a drink.

Tyler was his usual cheerful self. He never had any worries of his own, and wouldn't even flinch if the sky were to fall upon his head.

"Hey, mate. How are you doing?" We seated ourselves in a corner of a busy pub.

"Couldn't be better."

"Truly?" He eyed me. The same inquisitive look that my parents had shot me.

"I suppose the rumours have finally reached your ears," I sighed.

"They certainly have," he said, twisting the salt and pepper tray. "What friend am I to you anyway that I hear things about you only from others?"

"I thought you were busy," I sighed again. "Well, what can I say? You mean me and Jeanette, don't you?"

"So, it's true?"

"Me and Jeanette? Yes."

"Listen, mate. I'm all ears now. What's happened to you that made you fall in love with an old cow?"

"Tyler."

"No, seriously. Divorce was too much of a blow to you?"

"I never thought you were interested in hearing me out about my divorce."

"Come on. Is she rich?"

"Do I look like I'm after money?" I was tired. "Can't we talk about something else?"

“No, I’m afraid not,” Tyler said defiantly. “I’m here to talk some sense into you. Because you obviously don’t care about what your parents think anymore.”

“So, they’ve been talking to you?” I began to lose my patience.

“Yes, and they have all reason to.”

“You know what? Just stay out of this,” I heard my voice rise. “I don’t need your ‘sense’ if you’re here to tell me I have to quit her.”

Tyler was silent for a while, as he stared into my eyes.

“Okay, fine.” And with that, he left.

He wouldn’t understand anyway, even if he had the patience to listen to me. Just wished he could be there at the wedding.

I picked up the newspaper that I had grabbed from work, and turned to the gossip page, a part that had never had anything to do with me. It was already creased by the many handlings it had received. After the day’s events, I was compelled to take a look.

“35-year Old Man Marries 56-year Old Widow
Family and Friends Fiercely Disapprove”

My heart squirmed in my chest. I knew what it was about. Yet, at that moment, the paper felt alien to me. Was I to read on? The text, however, gripped my eyes before I could decide.

.....married last week.....

.....despite disapproval from his family.....

.....parents.....disavow.....

.....did not express any comments, but...

.....

.....anonymous.....

“.....not.....blessing.....
.....disregard family and friends.”.....
.....
.....for the money.....
.....true love?..... despair.....
.....former marriage.....

The article went on. But I didn't want to read on anymore. My heart was raging, trembling, crumbling. The paper slid out of my hands.

I could think of nothing but Jeanette. Her brilliant smile. Her swallows.

What was I to do?

The burning deformed court fishes the fool; Kafka is getting out of the coconut; the bear in the wheelchair goes from 1 to 100 faster than a heel.

You can mistake the carpet for a court-
yard shining under artificial light like a fool
holding himself steady on a smooth floor with a thousand heels
mimicking the beetle from Kafka's
Metamorphosis desperate to bear
the burden of making sense of a coconut.

Nobody makes sense of the coconut.
Nor do the judges at the court
know its difference from a bear
who calls himself a fool-
ish beast kicking his brown furry heels
at the gigantic yet less furry Kafka.

But that did annoy Kafka.
His Hunger Artist would know what coconuts
were. They certainly don't grow at his heels –
A fact well-know by all the women he courted.
Why, women are so sure coconuts are just the bear-
ings of a pretentious rational fool.

Fools swear they have all witnessed people fool-
ing themselves. No, Kafka
is not one of them. Fools send bear-
hugs to each other for breaking their own coconuts
which makes them lose their heels
falling from the Himalayas to the Almighty Court.

Everyone has been to Court.
If you haven't certainly you are fooled
into following Un-civilization at his heels
which of course doesn't really bother Kafka
who would care about nothing unless he must bear
the price of cutting open a coconut.

By now you should have grown tired of a coconut.
Who cares about a coconut at a court
anyway and who cares for a bear
which is just slightly less foolish than a fool.
Even fools know everyone has heels
and oh by the way who the heck is Kafka?

Just in case you don't get this, bear-
s, this is just a coconut poem about Kafka
being courted by fools to his heels.

Etta FUNG Healthy

Harbor of the City

This water is aged.
Deep golden wrinkles
drop from the sky, staining it.
A boat speeds by
searing white surges of sebum.
The trace of a transparent scab that follows
extends into infinity.

When an eagle dips for a fish,
It does not leave a dimple behind.
The spot is instantly washed away
in grey muddle.

The water in Victoria Harbor
always tells the same story.
The waves are forever wriggling
with vibrant undercurrents tearing away
useless components with a sense of efficiency.
It always has a direction.
What it is is not so clear.

This water is rich.
Fake yachts swing by during the day
under the thrust of screaming engines.
Cargo ships load the waters
with deep scratches.
The rigorous waves have to carry something –

heavy characters with burdens.
Cruises are just too fancy.

It is one of those waters that does not sleep.
Lights at the sides
drag it through hazy nights.

A ferry
carries a radiating golden dragon
on a golden throne. The party
is full. The guests
are falling over.

On the ferry the guests stay. Underneath them
the water is contaminated. The rigor
of this sea can kill. Sometimes
it does not kill. It lingers to torture.
The conspiratorial water is preying,
fishing with bubbling neon lights
Waiting for someone to fall.

Etta FUNG Healthy

Lost

Yaki Wo

Flash. Shudder. I stepped in. It was funny when I had my earphones plugged and music played aloud, the MTR compartment became an elongated aquarium, especially in this damp season; and the passengers the goldfish, their mouths opened and closed. Focusing on two of them, their mouths opened at exactly the same time as the lyrics were sung, and their tails moved at the same rhythm as the bass, as if a live music video was put on show.

“You can’t get lost in a cement jungle like Hong Kong,” his voice was lingering. The night before I talked about it the thirty-sixth time to Alvin, about the experience of getting lost alone in a foreign country, including of course how much I wanted to get lost again. The experience, I remembered clearly, was comparable to perfume. When I got lost, there was a sense of immediate fear, but it evaporated as quickly as the top note; then followed the calmness as I wandered in the Mediterranean breezes under the starry sky, as if the longer-lasting middle note; long after the experience, remnants of that enchanting feeling still dwelt, like the base note.

I was nineteen then. People seemed to be amazed that I, as a girl, dared go to such a desolate place on my own, but I did not see what was so daring of me at all. Shouldn’t we all treasure our youth and explore more of the world? So I asked the others what they did in their long summer, and I realized why I was an alien to them.

“Worked... got to know more people and expand my social network,” typical Hong Konger, how pragmatic.

“Nothing much really. It’s holiday! So I just ate and slept and played PS2 at home most of the time... but I went shopping and singing

karaoke too of course.” A big, fat parasite who was born with a golden key¹.

“Prepare for university. I read some books on DNA, another on bones and muscles...” Okay, a nerd that is. Yet another said she just went clubbing and getting pissed five nights a week, and she, Chrissie, happened to become my roommate at university.

It was to me a very strange and pathetic phenomenon when, as if naturally, people moved towards homogeneity and grouped themselves into different types of people, and within these groups they were clones of one another.

Two small goldfish bumped into me accidentally, the finger which I was biting clashed with my front teeth, painful as hell. They stood beside me and declared a thumb war. After much struggles one won the other by using his index finger, I could not hear what he said, but he looked proud and held his head high. Perhaps we were raised that way, as long as you won, it did not matter how you did it. I swam out of the aquarium, the strong tunnel wind brought dusts into my eyes, I was blind for a moment, but I always knew my way well enough to find the exit—Broadway Cinematheque, the art film house.

Cicadas were performing a symphony. It was a rare night. Usually I would just stay in and watch one or two films of the Artificial Eye, the label with a collection of the quiet, retrospective kinds of films, which Alvin and I loved most. But that night I tried not to seem too anti-social. On our way to the third club Chrissie’s new prey was gently tickling her waist, and she responded with her long fingers floating over his back. I was following behind, pretty used to the scene after a whole night’s spree.

¹ People who are born with a golden key have very rich parents and are likely to inherit possessions.

Under the yellowish street lamps the heated leaves and humid air mixed in a scent like brewing wine. I felt a little tipsy looking at the fun-loving girl in front. Straight, long black hair, with a fringe resembling that of Cleopatra, she did not look like an Egyptian though, with her chubby face and big tits. I supposed Egyptian women were thin sticks. I did not have that gift. They said I have a horse's face and they called me "microwave", in Cantonese it literally means "tiny balls". But Alvin said he did not care.

She was staggering, as if the four-inch heels were going to break any time, and that gave her prey an opportunity to hold her waist tighter. "Five shots dead" was her nickname, that night she had already had three and a half, the other half I finished.

Along the way they had been whispering. About what I did not really care, but all of a sudden she cracked into hilarious laughter, bending herself forward so wildly that I was sure her tits were falling out of her deep-V top, and from behind I could see her little black-laced panty under her miniskirt.

"Chrissie! For Christ sake can't you please control yourself? I feel sorry for those seeing your big ass."

"Sorry- haha..." She turned around, from her blushing face and falling eyelids I knew she would be dead before her fifth shot that night.

Barely consciously, she took over a cigarette from her prey, the black nail paints and thick eyeliners added to her a strong feeling of bitchiness. I remembered there was once she forced to apply that stuff on me and I protested like a rape victim.

"Relax... why don't you just try, bitch?"

"Why do you wear them then, bitch?"

"Cause I belong to the 'I wear too much eyeliner,' bitch."

“Cause I don’t want to wake up with dark circles and my pillow stained, bitch.”

“Nah... you just want to be different... you are an outcast! Outcast bitch!”

“I wear too much eyeliner” was a Xanga blogring. I did not see what kind of people could be so bored as to create bloggings like “I wear too much eyeliner” or “I come from the earth”. It was 2:40am when we were a corner’s distance from Dip, the club where we were heading to. Alvin would be home by 8pm his time. I drifted away and waved at a taxi. Chrissie did not need my company anyway.

Back at home I instinctively grabbed the phone and dialed and talked and talked and talked.

“Did I tell you I’m gonna watch Placebo’s concert next week?” He asked with thrill. He and I had agreed on the sophisticated music they played as best among all, their lyrics especially drew people into thoughts, to us they beat Radiohead.

“Oh I’m so envious!” I said following by a groan as I glimpsed at the piles of readings on the desk.

“You should,” and he giggled.

“Hmm... actually have you ever wondered why Placebo’s called Placebo?” I asked, and together we meditated for a minute, as if thinking seriously about the mysterious name.

“I think it means ‘it’s all about how you feel’,” I uttered first.

“Right... haven’t really thought about that before, so... it’s up to our interpretation.”

“Yeah, and it applies to all arts you see... sometimes we think too much about what a piece of art is trying to convey but neglect what we feel about it...” I talked on and on like a running turbine, not having a slight feeling of tiredness.

The fact that he was studying at the opposite side of the globe always upset me. We talked on phone almost every night, about big questions of life, humankind and society; but also about light-hearted funny stuff like how when we were small we used our toes to count numbers bigger than ten, how our parents told us swallowing gums would stick our intestines together... I felt somehow that we were tuned to the same direction and our mentality matched like a lock and key. We were somewhat secluded, as if having a light feeling in the head after sun-bathing.

36 Degrees was being played when Chrissie hopped towards me, her rather big body made the whole picture kind of awkward. I unplugged the earphones, and let them dangled across my neck. The music somehow surged upwards and reached my ears...

Stuck inside the circumstances, lonely at the top.

I've always been an introvert, happily bleeding...

Chrissie's high-pitched voice was fast to wipe away them all. She told me that she had got an internship at a well-known marketing company. I was surprised.

"What? I thought you'd never prepared for the interview!"

"No I didn't." She answered carelessly.

"But I heard from the others that you had to go through tests and answer lots of challenging questions."

"I have an uncle who's working in there. The interview, it's just plain b-s². You know, if you look good and pose as if you're confident, it doesn't really matter if what you say make sense."

Social network and appearance. It was not the first time I heard of people becoming "successful" because of the two weapons they

2 b-s, short for bull-shit.

possessed. Deep in thoughts, the minute chilled into ages, I picked my hair at the edge of my forehead subconsciously.

“Wa!” Chrissie gave me a short, intense shout and I startled at once.

“Holy crap you scared me!” Floating back to consciousness.

“Haha... com'on don't day dream! Let's go celebrate my offer!” She dragged me away from the Seven-Eleven where I waited for her. What was worth celebrating? Getting an offer without paying a goddamn effort?

Sometimes I cannot perceive how society recognized these people simply because they have a nice look or a good tongue. The wind cut my face like a blade as if reminding me that was reality. Unwillingly I followed her steps to the shopping hub where we “celebrated”. The leaves were already falling. For a moment I was afraid that I would step onto the ants or tiny organisms crawling in the layers of withered leaves. I pulled my cardigan tighter to warm myself a little.

That very night I went home by myself. I did not feel like going back to dorm and listening to Chrissie's chirps. It was quiet and comfy in the compartment. But outside, it was very dark. The goldfish had left for home, I guess, which made the aquarium unusually large. The light poles and neon signs were fading backwards, but the buildings afar were running ahead. Was I right if I improve myself and not be a similar person as the majority? Or should I tell people what I thought was right? Was it right to make people become what I thought was right? When the majority of people were wrong, was I still right? Or would I become wrong? What was right? These questions bombarded me all at once. Ignoring the public transportation rules, I ate a whole packet of Crunch.

Ten days later I was at Heathrow Airport. It was time to have a break from that life I did not belong to and run for my shelter, I thought. But that was a surprise visit. I told Alvin that I was going to Japan with my family for a few days and would not be calling him. I was excited, I surely was, as if a little girl embarking on her first school trip.

“The weather is lovely!” The British ladies and gentlemen I passed by on the way exclaimed. Right... blue sky and white clouds, those were just so not British.

Alvin was not home when I arrived. His flat mates Joe and Trevor served me nicely. Showing me around, helping me drag the luggage to Alvin’s room, chatting with me.

“Alvin talks a lot about you,” Joe said, we three lying on the sofa.

“Really?” I smiled, to a girl that means recognition, I was grateful.

“Yeah... he *surely* talks a lot about you,” I could see they exchanged glances and let out weird grins, but I was too tired to bother. After that little chats I took a rest at Alvin’s room. I rolled back and forth in his bed and drowned myself into the sweetness of his scent, then I felt something in his bed... cigarettes! And... a brand new, Placebo CD still sealed in plastic... which I gave him! I had never heard of him smoking... and why did he not unwrap the CD? These doubts were instantly put aside when my Alvin eventually came home. The moment we met turned out to be less dramatic than I had imagined, there were no standing in awe and running towards each other and tears plus kisses.

“How nice to see you, baby,” he said and gave me a hug. The passion need not be shown, for it was understood, that was what an understanding girlfriend should think, I thought.

At night I had a shower. The water came out to be bloody hot and chilly cold alternatively, I jumped like a monkey to evade the water sprinkles. That was why when I got out of the shower, I felt more tired than before. As I wiped away the steam on the mirror it let out a “jeet jeet” sound, I saw a blurry reflection of a pair of hands on my shoulder, gently giving me a massage. It was Alvin. We made love in the bathroom. He was so skillful, given in the past I would moan aloud, but I tried to keep it soft that night for fear of his flat mates overhearing us. Then we went back to his room and slept like dead pigs.

Perhaps it was jet lag, I was wide awake in the middle of the night, Alvin was no where to be seen, he might have gone to the washroom. The night was so quiet that I seemed to hear the ants snoring, outside the poisonous moonlight was shining through the window, it was a little spooky. I cuddled myself up with the blanket and avoid looking at it. Then I rolled over to side of the wall and tried to drift back to my sweet dreams.

“Hahahahaha...” I did not realize until then that the wall was so thin and I could actually hear the laughter from the room next to Alvin’s. And as I listened attentively, every single word indeed.

“That slut is really loud!” One guy said.

“When you fuck her next time ask her to scream the names of the philosophers!” It was Joe. Then came a crack of laughter.

“No... ask her to sing Placebo’s! Geez... will there be more upcoming shows? Hahahahaha...” Terence asked, his voice was as low as an ox.

“Sure there will. You will hear over meals how this holy little freak criticizes the government, the media, the people around her and how frustrated she is seeing the deterioration of humankind, hahaha...” Alvin, my dearest Alvin.

“Interesting...she is a rare kind! A horny, philosophical slut who thinks the whole world is going insane!” It was Joe again.

“Why do you think I would like her then?” The heartbreaker followed.

It was more laughter. The cigarettes and the CD reemerged from somewhere in the bed, a whirlpool swirled in my head and reminded me of that very afternoon, morning, and the many times Alvin and I spent together... I yelled, deep inside, then I was as calm as a meditating monk and drowned into my nightmares.

Why I stayed I could not explain, but what I did during then was shutting my mouth up most of the time, saying only nonsense at times and laughed so hard that my cheek muscles cramped; at night I moaned till my voice became coarse, they all seemed to feel uneasy, but I did what I want as best as I could. On the last night, when Alvin and I were in bed, I felt his scent so unbearable that I dared not breathe... and that was it. Maybe he was not my soul mate after all, and may be nobody was, and nobody is and nobody will be. I swallowed a box of Godiva before closing my eyes and slept, by the cold window.

A dreadful blanket had fallen onto Hong Kong when I came back. There were no more leaves on the trees or on the floor, people did not smile as beautifully as the sunshine hot girls; trench coat, scarf and gloves could not help in alleviating my chapped skin. Chrissie and I were dinning together. For the first time in my life, I made the move to date her. A ceiling-to-floor glass wall enabled us to see the harbor view from the inside, the lights were swaying; even the skyline seemed to be moving slightly. Browsing through the menu, the waiter told us about tonight's specials, which Chrissie ordered. I turned to the last page,

and pointed at the smoked salmon fettuccine alfredo. At this point I thought I had an obligation to defend for my will instead of giving in to whatever others said. Well, just a little principle of mine.

“You seem different today, bitch,” Chrissie asked, her face covered with a layer of worry.

“Huh? I’m just too tired. The jet lag,” I forced a smile and said.

“No... you’re wearing eyeliner,”

“No harm trying out something new I guess, am I sexy in it?”

“Sure you are, bitch!” We giggled.

Later we were eating. Chrissie was almost gobbling. She was mad hungry I supposed. I fetched a piece of smoked salmon into my mouth, but it dropped back onto the plate right before it reached my lips, for a second I gazed at that empty fork, a strange sense of hollowness seized me, I felt so light at once, as if I was going to float out of my seat, *what’s wrong?* When I resumed I started to eat mechanically, Chrissie sensed it. We both fell silent over the course, which added weight to the atmosphere. Then, as I scooped a spoonful of fettuccine into my mouth, I bit open a pepper grain and choked on it.

“Are you alright?” Chrissie was eager to ask.

“Yea... kerr... kerr...” I was still coughing, my tears were flowing.

“Are you really alright?”

“Yes... just choking...” suddenly I felt a sourness in my nose and my tears began to spill, uncontrollably, I was crying. I evaded Chrissie’s eyes and turned to the glass wall. It was 8:30pm, the laser show was on. I saw the background music of the show, smelled the colorful laser beams, heard the salty air from the ocean... there were a line of plastic-like plantation on the sea side; but in the restaurant, the tree in the painting of the wall seemed to have grown bigger. I was lost

again... but the top note this time seemed ever-lasting.

Somewhere afar I could hear 36 Degrees being played...

Allocate your sentiment, and stick it in a box.

I've never been an extrovert, but I'm still breathing.

The Last Words of Mark Rothko¹

I buried my stained palette beneath an (invisible) red plain.

Hush—
Plain is not plain!
Hark at the brushstrokes,
sniff the texture,
finger the reminiscence—
roars spill from the rankled past,
claw the finale of struggles,
and bog down in a stream of blood.

Something is clearing—
do you now see the red or the tints underneath?



Mark Rothko (1903-1970)
Untitled 1970
Acrylic on canvas
H: 152.4 cm—W: 145.1 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc. 1986

Carol CHENG Yuen-ting

¹ Mark Rothko (September 25, 1903 – February 25, 1970) was a Latvian-born American Jewish painter who is often classified as an abstract expressionist. His work concentrated on basic emotions, often filling the canvas with very few, but intense colours, using little immediately-apparent detail. He had a long struggle with depression, and finally committed suicide by cutting his wrists in his New York studio. ‘Untitled 1970’ is probably one of the last paintings of Rothko before his death.

Enigmas¹

You have asked me what the boy uses to stuff
the hollow in the chest of the girl lying on the ground,
I reply, the sand from Sahara.
You ask, why does the girl melt into the earth, even though
she is in the embrace of the boy,
I tell you the ground gets heated, like you.
You question me why they took an exile
from the resplendent metropolis to a deserted isle, and I reply
by imitating a woman's shriek in the middle of the night.
I jog around a gulf as you do, and
the sand whirling in the wind tells his adventure through the rift.

Carol CHENG Yuen-ting

1 The poem is an imitation of Pablo Neruda's Enigmas

The Blind

Ng Ka Yee Stephanie

“Finish eating mei ARRR?” I whine impatiently, holding my chopsticks as if they are drumsticks and begin to tap my set of porcelain cup, bowl and plate. It’s too boring. I need to make some music.

“Stop what you’re doing!” cried Fat Aunt Pig. She is putting a cube of pig blood into her enormously large mouth. I can see the brownish purple cube being chopped mercilessly by her uneven, yellowish teeth. Chop. Chop. Chop. The blood becomes a thick paste in her mouth and I’m dead scared that she may spit some of her blood on my face. “It’s a very rude act! Besides, whenever you tap your tableware, your luck of having enough or plenty to eat will be reduced,” she swallows her mouthful of blood and gives me a threatening look as she narrows her already-very-small eyes, “You want yourself starve to death?”

I ignore her silly question and slide off my seat skillfully. We always hid under the table when it got too boring during yum cha time. It was great fun down here! We would untie all the shoelaces of the adults! Not knowing which shoe belonged to which person, we would untie every pair of them, just to show our fairness. But I don’t feel like untying any knots today. Without Brother here with me, I just have no mood for anything. Please don’t ask me what had happened. I just don’t wanna talk about it right now. But I regret what I had done. Even though Mama says it’s nobody’s fault, that Brother has always got a weak heart...she is just so upset these days! Baba also becomes much quieter, and I can sense that he now love me less. Much less, I tell you. I know I have made Baba very sad as he likes Brother so much. He used to play with him a lot...I know that, though neither he nor Brother ever mentioned their secret play times to me. I know what’s

going on! Kids nowadays are very smart. So don't fool us. Yuck! Fat Aunt Pig's legs are just sickening! There are hairs standing all over her two short, bulky trunks! Not as bushy as Baba's though. I wonder whether Fat Aunt Pig is really a woman, or she is just disguising himself, pretending to be one---a nice one.

"So you two decided to go to Maldives?"

"Yep."

"For how long?"

"One week."

"It'll be good...for both of you...especially good for you ar, Ying... just take this opportunity to lighten up yourself. What's passed is past. Don't dwell on yesterday and the misfortunes anymore...fate...the most important thing is, Yip Fung is still with us!"

"Yea! You rest assured that I will take good care of him while you two are gone! No need to worry about him! Just try to cheer yourself up and pull yourself together again, OK? Ying, you really need this time o..."

"I wanna stay with Grandma!" I protest as I pop myself up from under the table. I don't like Fat Aunt Pig. We didn't like her. She is too fat, too ugly and too loud. Our secret name for her just suits her well---Fat Aunt Pig. She really looks like a big fat pig walking on two huge legs.

"Grandma can't take you this time la. She needs to have a medical check-up next Monday. Whose gonna take care of you then? A child shouldn't go near a hospital if he's not sick...brings bad lu..."

"I need to shh..." I interrupt Fat Aunt Pig intentionally.

"I go with you," Aunt Pig volunteers eagerly, "I need to go to the toilet too!"

"I'm going to the GENTLEMEN!"

“No, you follow Yi Ma¹.”

There is no more arguing as Mama has said the final word. Fat Aunt Pig drags me into the LADIES. She wants to shh so badly that she practically runs into the cubicle without closing the door properly. Just between you and me, Fat Aunt Pig makes super-loud ugly sounds when she shhs---she shhs like a running tap! Gurgling. I can't help laughing to myself. Brother would laugh his head off if he were here too! We were just crazy about catching people doing ugly things like picking their noses or when they are peeing or pooing. I bet you like doing that sometimes too. Right? But going to the toilets with Brother was a troublesome matter. He always wanted to go to the LADIES when the whole family went out together. I thought Brother did it out of mischief as he was willing to go to the BOYS in his kindergarten. But I never asked Brother why. Maybe he wanted to be a girl sometimes, especially when Baba was there. “It's OK la...you two are just kids!” Mama answered when I once protested to her that we boys should go to the GENTLEMEN with Baba. I lost the battle and I followed Mama and Brother dejectedly to the back of the long queue outside the LADIES. It's just so embarrassing!

“What were you laughing at just now?” Fat Aunt Pig finally finishes relieving.

“Nothing.”

“Come, your turn now,” Fat Aunt Pig leads me into the cubicle next to the one she just used.

“What are those?” I point to a small basket besides the toilet bowl. All cubicles in all the LADIES I have been to has one. I always want to know what they really are!

“Orrr...some women...they nose bleed,” replied Fat Pig Aunt hesitantly.

1 “Yi Ma” means “Aunt” in Cantonese

Poor women. Their noses must have bled quite a lot. The basket is nearly full. Those bloody tissues and bloody pads are going to fall onto the floor any minute!

When we go back to the table, the bill is already paid. Mama helps me to put on my little traveling backpack, hold my hand, and we all leave the noisy, stifling place. Outside, it's like an oven. No wind, but the sun is so strong that I can't really open my eyes to make out my way clearly. Grandma says a typhoon may come soon. I know nothing about the weather but I know that I'm not going to see Mama and Baba for a week. Are they abandoning me? Please don't.

"Yip Fung, be a good boy ar," Mama says in front of the stiles in the MTR station. She strokes my hair as she always does. "Mama and Baba will be home soon." Seeing that I give her no response, she adds lovingly, "We are not abandoning you wor, silly boy. Come, give Mama a kiss." I do as I am told. "Have a nice trip with Baba!" I finally utter.

Fat Aunt Pig takes my hand and we head for the MTR. Her hand is just so sweaty. Yuck!

"What are you drawing?" Fat Aunt Pig asks as she goes to the kitchen to get herself a glass of water.

"It's me and Brother, swimming!" I answer as I color the sea in deep blue.

"The water is too high la," Fat Aunt Pig criticizes, "You two will drown!"

I ignore her once again and re-enter my beach world with Brother. As I'm coloring the sea, Brother's face is suddenly darkened by a small flickering shadow! I look up and there it is---a small moth. It is flying around the lamp above my head and casting shadows here and there. The same as that evening. Me and Fat Aunt Pig watch the moth flies,

until it lands on the deep blue sea of my picture.

“Ma’s right. A typhoon may come soon,” Fat Aunt Pig murmurs.

I can’t hear what Fat Aunt Pig says clearly. I’m too occupied with the moth. I want to kill it! Just as I grab my ruler and am ready to hit it, Fat Aunt Pig yells, “Stop!” I jump. My heart beating fast.

“Are you OK? Didn’t mean to scare you...” Fat Aunt Pig says apologetically, with a soothing voice I have never heard. “You know, we can’t kill moths. They are dead people trying to see their loved ones one last time before going on to their Other Life,” says Fat Aunt Pig. I don’t really understand what she is talking about. How can a big person become something so small? How can human beings fly? The moth flies off without a sound. But if what Fat Aunt Pig says is true, then Brother would have killed a dead person that night.

Me and Brother were so excited as typhoon signal no. 3 was hoisted that evening. There was a big chance that we need not to go to school the next day. Hurray! We stopped doing our homework at once and took out our drawing things without further delay. It was a right time for some fun as no one was watching us---Mama went to Japan to work while Baba was cooking in the kitchen! We quickly plunged ourselves into our own artistic worlds.

“Look! A moth!” exclaimed Brother, pointing at his drawing.

“Oh, it’s a big one!” I examined it closely as it was resting very still on Brother’s drawing. It was yellowish white in color. It looked clean, but very ugly too.

“Wait,” Brother was inflated with excitement and he searched my art class bag fervently. He had always had a thing for killing small insects. His favorite victims were ants and he would use his thumb to squash them one by one. I wondered what he would do to the moth this time.

“Got it!” He smiled mischievously at me while waving my pair of scissors like a little flag. He opened and closed the blades speedily before directing it to his target. “Here I come!”

Chop. The moth was slain in half in a split second. There was no blood stained on the blades but some slimy liquid. Urgh! It was fun though. Brother continued to cut the different body parts off the moth--its wings and then the legs and I continued to watch. I wondered if the moth could feel the pain. If it was hurt, it should scream, like us. Yet, it did not. Maybe insects could not feel pain. Yes, it must be.

“What are you doing, Ho Fung?” Both Brother and I jumped. We were too occupied with our “work” that we had no idea how long Baba had been watching us. His face was expressionless, but there was no sign of anger. He kept fixing his eyes upon Brother, waiting for an answer that was not going to come.

“I see that you are hurting insects,” Baba answered for Brother in a matter-of-fact tone, “and you are hurting it in a very cruel and inhumane way, do you know that?”

Brother made no answer or response to Baba’s questions. He just kept lowering his head, and gave all his attention to the stained pair of scissors.

“How would you feel if you were the moth? Would you like someone to hurt you like the way you hurt the moth?” Baba took off Mama’s apron as he spoke. “I’m going to...Come. COME!”

“NO...!” Brother finally responded. He was on the verge of tears as Baba took hold of his arm. “No...please...no...” Brother pleaded as he was led down his chair. Brother looked at me imploringly as if asking me to save him. But what could I do? Before I came up with any good ideas, the door of Baba and Mama’s room was shut. Click. And locked.

I tip-toed to Baba and Mama's room and pressed my ear gently against the door. I heard nothing. I was relieved. At least Baba was not beating Brother. So I went back to our room and waited. There was a strange sound near the windows as the powerful wind outside was trying to force their way through the small gaps in the window sills. Me and Brother used to be very afraid of this strange sound as we thought it was some ghosts whining outside our windows. It took Mama a very long time to convince us that it was just the wind. Silly us. The rain was also pouring heavily. They made a loud noise as they hit themselves on our air-conditioner. I thought the possibility for us to have an extra holiday tomorrow would be very high...

The door finally opened. "Now go to clear up the table with your brother and help lay the table, OK?" Baba's loving and caring voice was back again. Brother re-appeared at the door of our room. He looked intact and unhurt. But his cheeks were burning and I saw that he was sweating. He joined me on the bed without uttering a sound. But I heard his breathing. Rapid and heavy.

"What did you and Baba do in the room? He didn't hit you, did he?" I so wanted to know, but Brother gave me no answer. He lied down beside me instead. It seemed that his breathing became even quicker and louder. But I didn't care. All I wanted to know was what had happened. I repeated my questions. Still, no response came and this just made me very angry. I was the older one and he dared to disobey and even ignore the Big Brother? I must teach him a lesson. I sank my thumb and my index finger's nails into the skin of his left arm and pinched him with all the force I could muster from my body. I just wanted him to give me some response, any response. And he did respond this time. Not with an answer though; but with a sudden and vigorous hiccough. He pressed his right hand over his chest as

he gasped for more air. I had never seen Brother like this before. I screamed for Baba. Baba was also shocked when he saw the state of Brother. He was speechless for a moment but then he recovered very soon---“What have you done to your brother? You naughty boy... irresponsible brother...”

Before I could defend myself, Baba rushed out to call the ambulance. What happened thereafter was all blurry. But one thing was sure---Brother left us the next day. Heart attack. Maybe I really pinched him too hard. His little heart, and his little body just could not take it.

Psst. The moth crashes on the light bulb of the lamp and drops feebly on the table. Can this be Brother? It hurts itself by flying to the light bulb. Is it blind or something and can't see where it's heading? No. No. This can't be Brother. He's not that stupid. I carefully take the stupid moth up from the table and put it into one of the flower pots Fat Aunt Pig keeps at home. I want to give the stupid thing a proper burial. It's a proper one, compared to throwing it into the rubbish bin.

“Yip Fung, time for bed!” Fat Aunt Pig announces suddenly. “Go and brush your teeth now.”

“No! I brushed them in the morning!”

“Ha, you naughty boy! I will tell your mom and dad you don't brush your teeth at night ar! Huh, I can't wait to see you with no teeth left in your mouth!”

Oh no, please. Not to Baba. Fat Aunt Pig, you are really very cruel! Baba already loves me much less after Brother died! Though Mama has told me many times that I did not cause Brother's heart attack and that no one is to blame for the misfortune, I still get the feeling that Baba thinks I was the one that killed Brother. This just makes me so sad. I love Baba and I can't let him think me of me as a bad or naughty

boy again! I must be good and obedient. Yes. I will be a good boy. I will listen to whatever Baba says and do whatever Baba asks me to do. Yes. I will do anything, anything that will make Baba happy and loves me once more. Yes. I will be good. I will be a very good boy.

I take out my toothbrush and toothpaste from my backpack and go to the toilet with no more objections. You know what? I'm suddenly very happy. I have a feeling that very soon, Baba will love me like he used to. I just can't wait to see him.

Call from the Natural Chain

A spot of crimson dropped from Cupid's arrow tip brushes a piece of sleeping cloud, which plants one mass of its portion in air to hatch a seagull winging as a bowed scroll o'er a sail towering on a brown yacht, gliding from the horizon of our drunken world to the seashore, where a crowned old tree stands merely beaming the hour, when a man with a bundle of white beard swinging o'er his knees and a pair of striped hands unweav'ng a knot on a baitless spear, frees a golden carp which Venus once swiped. The gold carp flies in the pool of the sky, merging the reflection of you and me.

Fiona CHENG Hiu-fan

Yachts at Tolo Harbour

(An imitation of "Stars at Tallapoosa")

The white undulating lines run after the brown yachts.
The roof of the pier is not the shelter they seek,
The seekers, circulating the paths of the clouds.
The routes are slow like snail and shallow like pond.

The eye herein embraces complexity.
There is the moon, the buildings, the mountains.
You are nobody in the dark well Harbour
But the key to marvel at the plain ocean.

Let these be your courage, galloping whales,
Erasing the concrete shadows, carven and fire-frozen,
Mounting the air-songs, neighing the symphony of night.
These songs are gay and fly without converging.

The snowflake or drop or flop of either
Is likely to fall. But in the yachts is dislike:
A bunch of graduates jogging away,
Jogging and jumping faraway for their passion,

Their passion that is all clamoring and hot;
Or, if not graduates, then their lost childhoods,
Aspirating gifts of naive forsakenness
And the underneath pearls the seashores hold.

Fiona CHENG Hiu-fan

Endless Rain

Susan Chan Man Ngor

It had been raining for so many days. Gently, subtly, little by little, the raindrops fell from the sky and mixed with mist. Everything on the street was covered by a thin white sheet. The mailman did not bother to carry any umbrella. He quickened his pace, with his hand holding a magazine. Having made the delivery for a year, he knew the subscriber well. The mailman kept walking, leaving some wet and dirty footprints on the floor. He came to a squarish frame house and rang the bell. A young man opened the door.

“Stephen, dying for your PLAYBOY?” the mailman said, “It is a special edition with Paris Selina as the cover girl.”

“Sh...Quiet!” Stephen looked around, made sure nobody was there.

“Ooops...I’m sorry!”

The mailman lowered his voice and they chatted for a while, excitedly, about women, of course. They then said goodbye to each other and Stephen went back to his room. He put away the latest issue and sat down, continued to type on the keyboard. Stephen rented this little house a year before when he came to Jefferson for his college study. After typing for a while, he looked through the windows, noticing the rain became heavier and the raindrops splashed loudly at the windows. When did it start? When would it end? Stephen wondered. Daylight had gone far away in his memory. And he found that some ants were moving in line on his desk. He did not remove them anyway. He just let them go. One or two of those little creatures had climbed onto his cup, but he ignored it and tasted the coffee inside. Suddenly, he heard the doorbell ring again. He put down his cup on a pile of books, papers,

and files. The whole pile slid a bit. It was about to fall, but somehow could still maintain a balance.

“Oh, Cleve! Come in. How are you doing?”

At the meantime, the phone near the TV set rang. Stephen walked quickly to catch it.

“Cleve, would you mind closing the door for me? Thanks!” said Stephen.

“Mom, Cleve has just come ... Yes, it is Cleve ... I don’t know why he’s been here ... Maybe he’s escaped from the school ... he is not as good as you think! Hahahaha!” Stephen looked at the door and smiled.

“Mom, I’m better now! Just a bit tired. Don’t worry about me! ... I am really alright ... I’ve kept him waiting for too long ... Ok, bye!” Stephen hung up the phone impatiently.

“Sorry, Cleve. My mom is a bit fussy.”

“What brings you here, Cleve?” He invited his guest to the sitting room. It was very neat and tidy. The curtain was purely white. The windows were wide enough for one to see the city park at the South. Under the clock at the wall was a TV set in which CNN news was broadcast – Bush was talking about the importance of family values and the respect of marriage in a presidential campaign. His supporters were yelling and waving the US flags. It was followed by a critic of a political analyst who predicted that Bush would beat over Kerry as he secured the support from most southern states. In the middle of the room was a small round table with two chairs. Stephen asked his guest to sit and then went to the kitchen to get some drinks. It was in darkness, but Stephen did not switch on the light. He went straight to the icebox at the right-hand corner and took out two cans of Coca-Cola.

The door remained *open* and the wind was blowing, swinging the calendar at the wall and scattering paper all over the floor.

“Let’s get some drinks first. Cleve, come on. What? You prefer Seven-up?” Stephen stood up, went to the kitchen again and got another can of Seven-up for his guest. He began to drink while another two cans remained *intact* on the table.

“So how is it going? You should have your midterms about now. You are envious of me, aren’t you? Idle at home all day long and exempted from all those exams. Two months already. A long vacation, isn’t it?”

While waiting for the reply, Stephen turned his gaze to his guest: this young man looked a bit darker than before. His nose was hooked in shape and his eyes were sharp like those of eagle. His hairstyle was a crafty cut. The sleeveless black shirt he was wearing allowed one to see his broad chest and sturdy arms. Stephen could smell a faint perfume of cologne from him. He looked at his guest as if he desired something from him. Unknowing why, Stephen felt his heart beat faster. But such kind of strange feelings are mingled with guilt.

“Anyway, how’s your life in school? Not as good as mine, I’m sure.” He smiled.

No reply.

Stephen continued to say, “I do not think that it’s good to criticize others at the back, as the Lord said, ‘Do not judge others or you will be judged.’ But as your dear friend, I do think that I need to remind you: Do not get too close to Frank and Carol. They know nothing but badmouthing people at the back. You’d better watch out. They keep inventing stories. They say things that one has never done or even thought of. You know, every time, when I turn back, I see them murmuring. They must be laughing at me! Every one in the class

should have listened to their gossip. And the little slut didn't dare to look at me. She must be scared of me!"

He put the drink heavily on the table. The table shook a little bit. He squeezed the can harshly and the liquid inside split out to the empty chair next to him.

"Oh, Cleve, I feel extremely sorry. I get you some tissue papers." Stephen went to the washroom to get some tissue papers. He cleaned the chair next to him.

"Every time when I think of those fucking guys, I can't help getting mad! The Lord says 'blessed are those who are gentle.' Surely I am in his cursing list."

Stephen sat down and stood up again. He walked near the windows, watching the rainfall. The gloomy light made him look even gaunter. His hair was messy; his eyes were dull; his striped pajamas were full of creases. He then walked to cupboard to get the Bible and turn over the pages. He pointed at a page and read out loudly to the nothingness in front of him

"Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error..."

He then turned to another page.

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination..."

"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh..."

He closed the book and continued to preach, "Jesus is my savior and my lord. I do love him. Every moment I can feel his presence with me, just as you with me now. Do you think I will betray my Lord?"

"You must get bored by my preaching. I'd better stop. By the way, do you wanna have a look at my house?" He then wandered around,

from the kitchen, the toilet, his parents' bedroom and lastly to Stephen's room.

Inside Stephen's room, the desk was placed in front of the windows. It was in an orderless condition. Books, files and papers were piled up here and there. A bowl of noodles, half-finished, had not been tidied up yet. The cup was full of coffee marks outside and the ants were still fooling around. Among the mess, there were a monitor and a keyboard. The curtain looked dull and moldy. The bed was next to the desk on which half of the blanket had landed on the floor. The pillow got an indentation of a head with some hair on it. The only tidy things in the room were those photos in the shelf next to the bed: Stephen sat with a young man, who had dark skin, a hooked nose, a broad chest, sturdy arms as well as a trendy hairstyle. That was Cleve.

"Cleve, did you read their online diaries? Frank and Carol keep writing nonsense. They write it in a very implicit way, thinking that I don't know what they are talking about. They are wrong. I could figure it out. I could see what others cannot see. Look at these words: "May the Lord save him" "Lord, have mercies on him." They think that I am sick. I tell you it is certainly not true. You know, I am going to fight back. I am going to write an essay on this issue: man and woman are created by God and man is for woman and woman is for man. Those so-called experts and psychologists say that some are born to be homosexuals. The stupid theorists claim that King David has an affair with Jonathan. David is a homo. Could you believe that? Bullshit! Our Lord is powerful and you know his power can save anyone who has that kind of disease. After all, God cannot create homosexual beings himself, right?"

On his bed, there are piles of PLAYBOYS, unread. Stephen felt embarrassed. He wanted to cover them with the blanket.

“No, Cleve. They are not mine. Don’t be silly, Cleve. I don’t read them at all. But my dad insisted on ordering them for me. He said they were good for me. He said as a true man, one should learn how to appreciate a woman’s body. I told him, “Dad, we are Christians. We can’t read them.” But he just ignored it and Mom didn’t stop him. He said he had to choose the lesser of two evils. He’d rather I masturbate when reading the porn than ...”

Outside, it was raining dogs and cats. Stephen asked his guest to sit on his bed and continued to talk for a while. He appreciated the silence of his guest. He was a good listener with whom he could share everything, he thought. He found there was a link between him and his guest. He drew himself closer to him. He gazed at his guest and his hand unconsciously touched his handsome face, his neck, his shoulder, his chest and further down to his limbs and ... He knew what he had been desiring from him – a kiss. His heart beat even faster. He leaned forward and he closed his eyes. His tongue began to move in the air. And he felt that his guest was stroking his back. It was such a fantastic experience, Stephen thought. Although this very moment had been repeating thousand times in his imaginations, it was still wonderful when it really happened. He had a feeling of release at last ...

All of a sudden, a fatal thunder exploded vigorously which struck his ears to deaf. Stephen opened his eyes. The thunder did frighten him, but the sudden disappearance of Cleve was even more threatening. He could hardly believe his eyes. Cleve, where are you? He looked around his room, finding nobody was there. Stephen was so scared that he swept everything on the desk to the floor. He stepped on his broken coffee cup and a stream of red liquid began to run from his foot. But he was not aware of it at all. He went out to search every corner of the house.

“Cleve, where are you?”

He searched the icebox for Cleve, but he could not find Cleve there.

“Cleve, where are you?”

He turned the table and the chairs upside down. He could not find him in the sitting room. He then went to the washroom, knocking everything on the ground.

“Cleve, where are you?”

He could not find Cleve in the washroom.

Stephen got out of the house. “Cleve, where are you? Where are you?”

He let the heavy rain fall upon him and make him wet through. He looked around and around and around. A suffocated feeling overwhelmed him. He could not breathe.

“Damn it! Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!” He cried.

Stephen knelt on the ground helplessly, collapsed.

Two weeks later, a bright sun replaced the cloud and the rain. The breeze, the birds, the flowers, and the grass- everything was so delightful. The excited mailman holding a magazine came to the house again. Stephen opened the door.

“Hey! Stephen.”

The mailman noticed that Stephen looked a bit different: his eyes were lack of brightness; his hair had never been combed. And it seemed that he had never changed his pajamas for two weeks and a strange smell was coming out.

“Here is your PLAYBOY.”

Stephen got the PLAYBOY indifferently and said, “It’s raining outside, let’s come in ...”

“What?”

“Let’s come in and have some drink.”

To his great surprise, the mailman found that the house was in a total mess as if it was passed by a hurricane. Everything was smashed and nothing was left unturned. The mailman wanted to leave but he was invited by Stephen fervently to his room. The condition of his room was even more disastrous and appalling like a battlefield. He noticed that there was a computer that had not plugged at all. All the PLAYBOYs were still wrapped in the plastic bags. Stephen then pointed to the empty bed and said to the mailman,

“May I introduce my friend to you, this is Cleve!”

That Creeper

Born to gardener parents, I have grown up
Watched by that window shade of green,
That creeper of name I do not remember
That sprang from a barrel and
Squeezed through bars
Of iron.

My father fed
Packets of plant candies like
Protein pellets my goldfish would beam at.
He sprinkled crushed egg shell, too,
And grinned: this tree
Does not fuss over its snacks.

He must have liked the creeper for
Other reasons I know, that it was perennial and
Always sprouted flowers of magenta,
My mother's favourite colour. Real petals
Or a pencil-rubbed specimen on a
Birthday card – the veins always impressed her.

Creepers cannot stand. Ours crisscrossed
Its frame and rained a leafy half-umbrella
In the sun. I pulled a stand and a stool
Into the balcony and sat tracing on my sketchbook
A shadow by its round-hearted rim.

A potted violet rests in my window-sill
But in the dormitory I let
A Venetian blind down. Outside I settle on a
Garden bench, smoothing on my lap a wrinkled note
Smudged with scribbles and annotations.
A large cloud has swum past
Before my lover's giggles lift my head.

Trees embrace us here, most evergreen.
In a backyard a mother hurries to her toddler
To pin a morning glory on that little chartreuse vest.
I run my fingers through my hair
And catch a petal pink as
The candy floss puffing a paper box.
But the weather gets horrible sometimes. In one
Downpour I dashed under the sun canopy of a
Tuck shop. The menu had all mouthwatering sundaes
And beneath them, *Smiles*, it read, *Free*.

Living on campus now I return home
Once a week for dinner. A creeper, now fully lignified but
Slightly drooping, pours from its rusty frame to
Wave at me. The shoots need trimming, tease me, but
Mama laughs, lines tailing her eyes,
And Papa pokes his head
Out of the kitchen, singing "green does us good".

Jean TSE Yuk-tin

A Serenade not Sung

Of certain weaknesses men dread and master,
only trees of ebony are put to paper.
Canned infusions of runners' blood uncoil leaves
of creepers; in such a symphony
fingers press and prance in pageful stores
that crumpled into lines are mistaken identities.

Leafy mannequins poise in tagged identities
men recognize by the scarves no Hermès master
can put on spring sale in their stores.
Architects dream skyscrapers onto sketch paper;
then an iron and steel symphony,
for commemoration, ashes summer twists of leaves.

A hotel slumped in gold and glass always leaves
our holiday feasts unseasoned with identities
of backpackers. Coins clink their symphony
of praise for the self-made master,
one in the collegiate dreams unfolded in paper
scrolls, scrolls and honours we need in stores.

But triumphal arches clog, just as cultured stores
of berries lay pecked by backyard sparrows. Leaves
of maple are swirled with paper
yellowing in breezes, recycling some identities,
once sought-after, only scavengers care to master
now as if in the finale of a global symphony.

Towering drowned in a chattering symphony,
a statue of poetry filters through lyric stores
for addressed serenades by a master
now departed: a maverick always leaves
for gusts and blasts, for evangelical identities
that can never be hardened onto polaroid paper.

In the lamplight caught in a science paper
some loose wings flap in their last symphony,
losing the white gowned identities
of genes from well-catalogued stores.
Volumes are stacked, some with clover leaves
blotted dry and dignified, to harden that master.
A robin flees into a midnight garden and leaves
in fossilized stores feathers of ash, drapes for the symphony
men throw for forward identities, towards the paperless space they
master.

Jean TSE Yuk-tin

Hello, Goodbye.

Wong Nga Lai, Wendy

Ah Yan was leaving. Outside the restricted area, people were saying goodbyes to each other. Some of them cried, some hugged, some held each other's hands tightly as if they would never let go. Behind them, the word "DEPARTURES" on the glass wall indifferently looked upon the scene.

"Listen, Jan. Take the job. It'll be fun." Ah Yan said as Jan handed her the luggage.

It'll be fun, Jan smiled ambiguously. They had known each other since secondary school. Now Ah Yan was going to stay in England to do her Master's degree for two years. Jan did not know if she could manage it. She felt a little bit unsettled but did not show it.

"Take care." Jan said. They gave each other a final hug. There was nothing they could do when the moment had to come.

Jan considered for several days whether or not to accept City Coffee's offer after Ah Yan left. Take the job, Jan recalled Ah Yan's words. She finally took the job. It was her first job as a fresh graduate.

What followed was a one week training program given by the company. Jan was quite anxious before she met all the young and energetic people, who later became her colleagues, in the training program. Like Jan, they were mostly fresh graduates and came from different schools. On the first day, the manager asked them to share some unsatisfactory dining experiences they had had, so that they could discuss and learn from mistakes. A guy named Alan said he discovered a moth between two layers of pasta in the Lasagna when he dined at Spaghetti House the other day. This was supposed to be

disgusting and gross but for no reason, another girl named Suki found it exceptionally amusing and started to laugh. Again, for no reason at all, everyone followed and laughed until the manager stopped them and said it was time to move on to the next point.

The week passed quickly and everyone was excited and ready for the job. Good times laid ahead, Jan sincerely believed.

According to the “basic principles of hospitality” that Jan learned in the training program, a remarkable service was a friendly and immediate one. So staff in the coffee shop were expected to greet the customers within ten seconds after they came in.

It was four on a Tuesday’s afternoon. Only one table was occupied. The background music of the shop was interrupted by the sudden laughter of this group of students; nevertheless, the shop was made much livelier because of their presence. Jan was humming a melody and organizing the magazines at the stand when the glass door opened.

“Hello!” Jan turned around and said.

The guy looked around and observed the shop’s furnishings. With his earphones on, he probably did not hear Jan.

“Hello.” Jan smiled to him and repeated when she walked back to the cashier. His I-pod mini still stopped him from hearing anything from outside but this time he noticed Jan. He nodded.

Standing in front of the cashier, he raised his head to read the menu. Jan patiently waited for his order. He was so tall. At least two heads taller than me, Jan randomly thought.

“What’s the coffee of the day?” He took off one of his earphones and finally spoke.

“Today it’s Brazil coffee, sir.” Jan replied in a little bit louder voice in case he could not hear it.

He looked at the cups lined neatly on top of the espresso machine. “Well then ... I’ll have a large one.”

“Sure. Do you want to stay here or take away?”

“Erm... take away, please.”

“Large COD to go, please!” Jan’s clear bright voice.

“Large COD to go, thank you!” Her partner got the order and started making it.

The large coffee of the day was done. He paid for it and said, “Cheers.”

“Bye!”

“Hello?”

“O-ha-you!”

Despite the delays and disturbances over the long distance call, Ah Yan still had no difficulty in recognizing Jan’s voice.

“Silly! What’s that?”

“It means good morning. A Japanese businessman comes to our shop frequently and I’m learning one Japanese word from him each day!”

“Cool! You seem to be doing pretty well!” Ah Yan said in delight. She always shared Jan’s happiness as if she had the exactly same feeling as Jan did.

Jan’s interest in this job really exceeded her expectation. She told Ah Yan enthusiastically about all the interesting customers she met at the shop - businessmen who worked nearby and were hopelessly addicted to coffees. Some of them needed several cups of doppio to keep them conscious every day. A young man aged twenty-something who brought his laptop every time he came. When he came, he always stayed for the whole day and had all his three meals here. They later found out that he was a freelancer and what he wanted was actually

the shop's free wireless internet connection. An actress of TVB who always sat at the corner and studied her scripts. The male friend who came with her changed regularly. Sometimes it matched with the stories in the tabloids and entertainment magazines. Sometimes it did not.

Jan remembered all these people. She even jotted down in a little notebook the names of some regular customers and their favorite drinks.

“Your Americano, Satou san. *Arigato**.”

“*Su-go-i**!” the Japanese businessman, Satou, laughed and picked up his coffee, “Bye!” Outside the shop, Jan saw someone was coming.

“Large COD to go!” Jan called as Mark pushed the glass door. He entered when Satou san was just about to leave.

“Hello, Mark!”

“Hello, Satou san.”

Mark came to the cashier. “Erm... large coffee of the day, please.” Mark's coffee was ready after he just finished ordering.

“Efficient.” He smiled, putting the money in Jan's palm.

Mark was the guy stuck to his I-pod mini and large coffees. Jan knew he worked for long hours because her colleagues on the night shift told her he came and bought another large cup of coffee back to the office when most people were hurrying back home for dinner. But he was quite relaxed today. He stood and stayed in front of the cashier with his take away cup.

“You know Satou san?” After a brief moment of silence, Jan plucked up the courage and asked. She had never asked him any other questions except what food and drink he wanted and whether he wanted to stay here or take away.

**Arigato*: Thank you

**Sugoi*: Very Good

“Yes, our companies are on the same floor in the same building.”

“I see.”

Mark still stood there and drank his coffee slowly. Jan grabbed a white towel, trying to find something to rub even though everything was completely tidy and clean, until she heard him speak again, “Don’t you feel tired, standing for the whole day?”

Jan was surprised, “A little bit, but I bet your job is much tougher than mine.”

Mark sipped his coffee, and then he asked, “How do you know?”

Jan’s heart skipped a beat. She felt like a child playing a trick but accidentally caught by an adult. But then she calmed down quickly; she could hear a sound from the rational part of her brain – no, he wouldn’t know. So she said, “I just ... guess.”

“Yes, it’s tough, but I like my job.” Mark said casually.

Silence. Then Jan had this sudden impulse. She asked, “Do you have time to go out with your girlfriend if your workload is so heavy?”

“I don’t have a girlfriend.” He said.

“Oh.”

“Maybe he’s married...” Ah Yan was amused by her own joke and broke into laughter before she could finish the sentence.

“You’re crazy...” Jan always admired Ah Yan, for her ability to get happy so easily.

“..... He just says he doesn’t have a girlfriend. Maybe he has a wife!” Ah Yan still continued the joke even though she knew it’s nothing but silly herself.

“So what? I don’t care.” Jan said playfully.

“Oh!”

“No,” Jan cleared her throat and tried to sound serious, “I mean

it's none of my business. Just because I like him doesn't mean I want to go out with him."

...

"You sure?"

...

"Sure."

"Hello!"

"Hi! It's so hot today!" Mark said as he walked towards the magazine stand. He chose a magazine, sat down and started reading while he was waiting for his coffee. Because he developed this habit of not asking for anything after entering the shop, he was joked by the staff to be "the spoiled customer". He took it for granted that every one in the shop knew what he wanted and would start making his drink automatically.

While he was standing in front of the cashier and getting the money from his wallet, Jan glanced at his hands.

"Your coffee of the day." No ring, she smiled.

"Thanks." He smiled back.

There were, of course, many anonymous customers who just came once or twice and were never seen again. Jan always wondered if there was anything in the shop they felt not satisfactory, but she got no chance to ask.

Through the glass door of the shop, Jan could also see many passers-by outside walking towards two opposite directions. Sometimes they would stop and look through the door into the shop. Some of them would come in; some would hesitate and continued their journey. Some would enter, circle around in the shop and leave without trying a coffee. Occasionally, the door was pushed suddenly and entered some people who just came for a shelter because they got caught in

the rain.

The summer of that year was continuously hit by torrential rains. It was memorable.

But things began to change after a Starbucks opened fifty meters away from their shop. Jan and her colleagues got time to chat during morning rush hour, when originally there should be customers lining up in front of the cashier and the staff did not even have time to take a good breath. The shop should be full of cheerful drink-calling voices: Small latte to go! Large cappuccino for here! Customers in the queue would recognise some familiar faces, nodded and smiled and said good morning, even though they did not really know each other. People's voices, the aroma of coffees and the working sound of the espresso machines mixed together - those were the days. The sales of City Coffee dropped obviously.

Staff of the shop got their salary later and later each month. They grew restless and started to have many complaints. Some of them said the shop violated the law; they said companies had to pay their employees within the first week of every month. Some lost their working incentive and served bad coffees to customers. Jan saw Alan and Suki reading the Classified Post during lunch break the other day.

That night when they were about to leave the shop, Jan asked Suki, "Are you searching for a new job?"

"Yes, just in case." She answered, as if it was the most usual thing in the world.

"Why?" Jan's voice was a little bit shaky.

Alan overheard their conversation and said, "Be prepared, Jan."

They folded their uniforms and put them in their bags. Then they walked towards the exit, pulled the door and left, leaving Jan alone in the dark.

It was a common Thursday in July. The weather was great after many days of rain. It was also one out of very few days in the year the word “hazy” was not mentioned in the weather report. The sun shined mercilessly as if it wanted to melt everyone on the street.

Jan was still in bed when she got the call.

She was told that she need not go back to the shop again.

City Coffee closed down.

Jan held the phone and froze. She kept lying on the bed and felt all the strength in her body drained away. She could not even move a limb. Outside the window was a clear blue sky, little pieces of cloud floating and merging into one big lump. But immediately it was blown by the wind and was split again. Jan closed her eyes.

“Where are you?” When Jan regained her energy, she called Ah Yan.

“I’m in the tube. Sorry, I can’t hear you clearly.”

“The shop closed down.”

“Oh dear.”

“...”

“I don’t know what to say. I wish I was with you, Jan.”

“Thanks. I’m okay.”

“Call me whenever you want, okay?”

“Okay.”

“...”

“Hello?”

The call was cut abruptly, they did not even have the chance to say goodbye.

Jan set off to the shop. She insisted on doing so as if she thought what she was told was merely a joke. She could never see Mark, Satou san and all the other customers again. It could not possibly happen.

She could still remember the last time Mark came for a large COD; he was wearing a blue striped shirt. His back was soaked with sweat because the temperature on that day reached up to 35 degree Celsius. Satou san had also promised to bring her some sushi his wife made after he knew Japanese food was Jan's favorite. No, it must be a joke.

But there was nothing could be done when the reality was right in front of her eyes. Across the road, behind the glass door, the shop was dark and silent.

Jan stood there for a long time, paying her last respect to City Coffee.

There was no place Jan wanted to go; she just wandered aimlessly in the city. The color of the traffic light changed. People around Jan hurried across the road but Jan stood still. Some of them cast a curious look on her. Her face is blanched. A group of people gathered under the electronic billboard, watching the breaking news.

London Blasts: Tube Train "ripped apart"

Jan's throat was stuck. Her heart shrank. She was unable to think but instinctively, she dialed the familiar number.

"The number you dial cannot be reached at the moment. Please try again later..."

Another day

A buzz of steps, machines, reports and chats
attacks my ears, my brain, my dream –
piercing white light is off while
the sun intrudes upon, magnifies the
blank-whiteness shelling

me – jingling the gossip,
seeping in sterilized air,
white ceiling wrapping me
murmuring behind
lips –

Eyes unfolded, closed;
not a little word, nor a little sound,
not a loose hold of hand,
nor a brief touch of finger:
dew beads line eyelids; drip one

by one. The body is spread on the bed
with short gasps
and twitches that are
not mine. Every drop of me

flows into broken lines and beeps —

Cindy CHAU Sin-yee

BH 1886

He sat me in the back seat.
Out he went,
Sprinkling buckets of water over me.
The sound of water splashing
Blended with my giggles.
“I’m wet through, Dad!”
I did not realise
The seat was dry,
And so was I.

“Don’t worry, girl.
I’ll pick you up real soon.”
I stood alone
On the pavement
With my new school bag
Till the plate that read BH 1886
Reduced to a dot.

It was my first time.
I sat stiff,
Grabbing the wheel,
With four hands if I could.
I was taming a beast
Named BH 1886.
“Take it easy, girl.
It’ll be a piece of cake.”
I couldn’t quite tell left from right.

But I had a talking compass
Right on my left.

Since then,
BH 1886 took me
From Shirley to Billy,
To and fro, learning and working.
A computer print roster
Stuck to the porch at home.
Tue, Thu, Sat mine
Others, his.
“I need it for Friday.
Can we swap?”
A slam of the door.

Once—
I believed the seat
Of BH 1886 was wet.

Betsy LAU Pik-sai

FULL MOON

Christine, Hui Yue Mun

An old Chinese saying claims, “the moon in the outside world always looks bigger and rounder than the one we can see at home.”

“ ... But in my tearful eyes, the moon gets smaller and rugged when I alone look up at this starless sky -- through this petite window -- on this windless night.” That was what I penned down in my travel diary on the day of Mid-autumn festival two years ago at the foreign student residence.

Like other exchange students, I embraced the chance of flying high. I was not the kind of girl to be homesick, so I found staying away from Hong Kong exciting. Soon I settled down in that far-off ‘laissez-aller’ paradise called France.

Living in a country where people speak only my third language was never easy. Experimenting with my broken French every day, I was just brazen-faced enough to laugh through the childish grammar mistakes or the silly mispronunciation I made. When the English-no-way locals saw me stammering helplessly, what I won in return were teasers’ mockery, or whites of their eyes. I could still remember the first time I dreamt in French. It was a nightmare, unfortunately. My line of survival, “Je ne sais pas ... je le comprends pas ... ” echoed, echoed and echoed in my head.

Despite the irremovable language barrier, I realized that the well-known French “douceur de vivre” was even more irresistible. Enjoying carefree life in my rhythm, I never had a spare minute to think “I miss home”. The only line I recalled sometimes was my dad’s “grant of absolute right” when he saw me off at the airport, “Seize the days. Grasp your months! Just explore wherever you like!”

Thanks to the time lag, my parents and I never skyped, seldom IDDED. What connected us was email instead. Standing separately at the two extreme ends of Eurasia, never would we have imagined the distance would inspire us to write heart-to-heart. Through the instant message transmission, we typed out our cares and thoughts, which we would have been too embarrassed or too busy to voice out face-to-face. Since then, it seemed that Dad and I gradually got addicted to checking our inboxes, then click ‘compose’ and ‘send’ buttons every night.

Habitually, I dominated writing the hyper-excitement about my novel adventures. Dad, always as Mum’s secretary, kept me up-to-date with everything in Hong Kong, followed by some reminders of caution and his lecture of wisdom. I forgot when he started revealing to me bit by bit his secrets – those ups and downs of his youth and some past difficulty of our family during the financial crisis. Yet, he seldom talked about his work no matter how many questions I raised.

One time, it was strange that he replied to my email three days later, in brief,

“ ... I will try to complete the project within this month, but there is one big obstacle. I will let you know when I call your room tonight before I go to bed. I will call Issac too.”

I forgot to wait for his call. Instead, my friend and I grabbed two fossil-like moon-cakes at a bargain of EUR 8.88 and dragged a second-hand 22” television with our bare hands from Chinatown all the way back to our dormitory. That night, we two girls soaked like wet towels and I fell asleep right away.

Next morning, rays of sunshine kissed my cheeks and the ringing of the phone woke me up.

Before picking up the receiver, I quickly and wittily covered up my previous absentmindedness, *“Dad, I plan to phone you and Mum a few hours later when you two will be having the Mid-autumn festival dinner with grandpa and grandma.”*

“I am afraid we will not dine with the family tonight.” His voice was slightly feeble, with a pitch as flat as low G.

“I am now in the hospital ward.”

The calmness of his tone made me shivered a bit.

Dad’s coarse, deep breath emerged the ear-piece.

“I phoned you yesterday, but no one answered ...,” explained slowly in his typical style, *“well, um ... I am going to have an operation tomorrow.”*

“Why?”

“What happened, dad? Grandma in hospital?”

Silence sank in, soon followed by a series of serious questions.

“Unfortunately, it’s liver cancer. Yet, fortunately, it’s in ‘early phase’,” Then he hiccupped slightly.
“No worries, sweetheart.”

“You know me, dear. ...”
He attempted to cover up his gasp.
“I love jokes, but I won’t tease myself with this.”

“ ... ”
“An operation?”
“What really happened, Dad?”

Immediately my mind went blank. Nothing could I visualize except the face of my energetic and benevolent father, who always used to twinkle his left eye with wide grin.
“How come, Dad?” “No kidding, please.”

It was the moment I learnt what absurdity meant.
My dad used to play tennis and run marathons.
My dad seldom ate anything fatty and salty.
My dad never drank and never smoked.

My dad ... My dad ...

“When did you first know it?”

I could not suppress my apprehension and agitation.

“Months ago, when you carried out voluntary work in rural China... during May.”

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier?”

I urged, though I knew I shouldn’t be pushy.

“Darling, you are the third one to be notified.

Your mum first. Your brother, Issac, second.

You know what ... We lied to your grandma and grandpa that Mum would accompany me to go for a business trip for a couple of days ...”

Dead air faded in.

I knew I should terminate the interrogation.

“Dad, are Mum and Issac fine?”
spoken softly with a silent sob.

“Mum looks too scrawny. Don’t tell her this! Or she will be mad and sad. Travelling to and fro

hospital and home is physically taxing. Issac is fine in the States. I called him yesterday. I warned him to concentrate on his studies and don't think too much about Hong Kong ...”

It seemed to me that ... he was the director of his story.

“How are you feeling now, Dad? To be honest, it's difficult to stop worrying about your health under these unexpected circumstances.”

“Are you telling me the very truth of your illness? I can stand it.”

“No worries. I have met with the best doctor. Your dad is physically fit and mentally tough. The doctor is more than happy to appreciate my take-it-easy attitude. Everything under control. Cancer is serious, threatening, and irreversible sometimes. Thank god that I do an annual medical check-up. ...”

This was the most shocking and ironic telephone conversation I had ever had! My dad never talked to me in such a low voice. He was that kind of man who never needed a microphone. On the other side

of the telephone, his eloquence and cheerfulness fueled him and me with great confidence. Definitely it was not the right time to bother my dad by squeezing every detail of the technical knowledge and medical arrangements in order to satisfy my reporter-tempo curiosity. How peacefully we chatted for some more minutes, as if we were strolling by the riverside! That was the only thing I, as daughter, could do.

I rounded up our talk by exclaiming, “You are really tough, Dad. Don’t worry about me.”

“Issac SMSed me. The weather in L.A. would stay good over the week.” He then whistled.

I wept for the first time since my arrival to France. Only a hug could mend my broken heart in this frozen room of gloom.

That morning, I did not skip classes. I concentrated on my lectures. I read books and discussed projects. I ate. I munched whatever crap I poured into my mouth. I ate for the sake of mealtime but not because of appetite. After school time, I needed a break. No longer could I stop my tears from dotting over my face. Roaming along the streets, wandering from one metro station to another, I beheld still at my miserable reflection on those glass windows. As his daughter, I knew I bore the calm-and-rational gene. However, I wished I knew how to be calm and rational. To commemorate such an explosion of truth, I did not need a retail therapy, but an indulgence to be emotional for some hours.

I could not believe my ears. I could not believe that he had to tell Issac and me this piece of sad news – separately – twice – in such a beaming tone. I could not believe he still reminded me to make travel plans. I could not believe he went back home from hospital every two days just for reading and replying to my emails.

How silly had I been? I should have realized something went on

differently. Some previous traces, either a line or a gesture, had left me with tiny question marks. The submerged reality finally filled all those blanks. Having studied in Christian schools for over a decade, I had never prayed seriously. Gazing at the distant moon in my bed, I prayed hard. During that silent moment, my imagination began erupting. I wished I could sit on a carpet-like flight-ticket, flying towards the moon on the other side of the world. Nothing did I desire but a reunion at home, to stand by my mum and wait outside the surgery room.

Flipping over my old travel diary, I soon turn to the page where a leaf-shaped bookmark lies. I hand-made that little piece of art a few days after my dad's operation.

The autumnal tints in that Provençal city were surprisingly refreshing, without an air of decadence. Lines of the firmiana had their green leafage turn into the spectrum from gold yellow to scarlet red, with their form and pigment resembling the Canadian maple trees. The caressing daylight resonated with the warm hue of small painted houses along the riverside promenade. I would never forget such a canvas-like image – the hami-melon and lemon facades as well as the burgundy-brick chimneys! When I walked by a fountain, the gentle waft swept away the fallen leaves and wilted flowers, similar to how the delighted expression of my father's surgeons wiped off our previous sorrows and anxieties.

As usual, Dad was a battler with strong will. He was one of the few patients who needed not be observed in the Intensive Care Unit right after the operation. Despite the unavoidable weight loss, he recovered much faster than everyone's expectations including the doctors'. All those scanning tests signaled remarkable improvement. It was convinced that he need not face any other bodily threat in the future. Our whole family was over the moon at this relieving news.

According to what Mum reported, Dad did not behave like a patient at all. True. The first thing he did before he arrived home was to head straight to the hair salon for a trim. The first thing he bought was a tube of scar-removing ointment, which he never forgot to apply to his inverted T-signed wound three times a day. He always joked that his scar was like the ‘logo of Mercedes Benz without a circle’ sprawling across his stomach. Everyone knew my idealist dad was trying hard to tone down the colour of his stitched blemish. At the same time, I sensed his effort in alleviating our concern over his health, even though I could not witness how he really led his life during those critical months

Time proved that my dad’s intended plan of distraction worked, worked with me at least. I did not realize exactly when everything seemed to return to normal again. Dad and I soon re-engaged in daily email conversation, sharing our interesting sundries and amusement. In a heaven where most citizens only worked thirty-five hours a week yet enjoyed five weeks of holiday a year, the international students in my host university soon integrated into this relaxing national culture. While some found themselves majoring in clubbing, my friends and I found ourselves majoring in traveling, as if we were privileged to leave all sorts of burdens behind and to rock our lives however we liked.

During school days, there I could afford the time and the mood to cycling along those broad and unpacked boulevards under the moonlight. Lifting my head to the crescent moon, I often pictured a beige-painted rattan basket, loaded with pearls of bliss inside.

Day after day, joyful moments were gradually crystallized into unforgettable memories. Eventually I flew back from that far-off

country to Hong Kong.

Lying on the sofa in our living room, I could sniff the same old aroma of home-sweet-home, even though it was now tinged with the smell of Chinese medicine. Only because my dad took the herbal remedy prepared by my mum every day, I considered him a patient. Despite his slight failure in defending his hairline, he still appeared much healthier and younger than many typical middle-aged men in Hong Kong. In contrast, it was my Mum who always looked paler and more exhausted than before.

Today was the 14th February, a Saint Valentine with a rainy, hazy, gloomy backdrop. Mum and I went to the hospital to visit Dad. It was the third occasion for him to receive the regular post-operation treatment since I came back. Whenever he told us that he would be spending a few days in the Queen Mary for this and that, his tone of composure as easy as light music made my heart constrict unnaturally. That strange feeling was so intricate and ambivalent that it defied description.

So far Dad just laughed his misfortune through. Not only did he have the anti-aging gene, but also the ‘high-AQ & high-EQ gene’ that I, as his daughter, had never inherited from him. I was not able to be here to support him right after his big operation two years ago. For the first two occasions he received the treatment, he demonstrated his bravery. We ended up chit-chatting during our brief visits. In the ward, we watched TV soap opera together, just like what every Hong Kong family did at home after dinner.

However, the atmosphere tonight was a different story. He was so powerless that I just went wordless. The doctor said my dad experienced some kind of negative reaction towards the chemical injected into his body. Without the strength to speak, he uttered nothing

but three words, “ho - sun – fu”, terse enough to express the meaning of torturing to vomiting. As he dared saying “ho sun fu” in front of me, I would multiply its intensity by at least 1000N.

From that moment onwards, I redefined my interpretation of “helplessness” – helplessness simply meant ... “Seeing the closest suffer, I could just do nothing, and I did not know what to say.” I detested myself. I detested my mere physical presence in the ward. I started sketching what the actual ward scene was like during the post-surgery time. Well, my brother, Issac, still knew nothing about this version of the truth since he had not come back home for some time. Haunted by this melancholy, I started wondering to what extent I was deceived by the imperfect information transfer when I was temporarily away.

Mum and I bought Dad some blooming yellow roses, although they were sold at an unreasonable price. Dad smiled when we came in with those flowers, although he politely asked us to bring them back home. Anyway, “listen to the patient always”. Lying in the automated patient bed, with his two arms holding the hung ring of handle, Dad was not able to sit up. Therefore, he commanded me to pull the drawer and take out his Tai Chi manual. Right beneath the book, there were two big red envelopes. To our surprise, one Valentine’s Day card for my Mum and ... one for me! My Mum gave my Dad’s forehead a tender touch and softly kissed his cheeks. My Dad was always the sweet big kid. He was the kind of man who would fetch a wind-surfing suit to cover up his Benz mark on his stomach for the sake of swimming.

Saint Valentine’s is a day for lovers to forget where their Mum, Dad and friends are! On the same day one year ago, I was mooning around down the way in the Champs Elysee and along the River Seine

Promenade, doing whatever crazy in the romantic Paris. When I forgot where my family was, Dad sent me a short diplomatic note to my email box – wishing me a “Happy Valentine’s Day in France”. I used to think that he was poking fun with me. He never wished me happy on February 14 whenever I went out with boys. Instead, he just warned me thousand times to be a Cinderella.

Reading the well-picked humorous card, I realized he did not make fun of me. Even if I had not been lucky enough – wrong guys just kept coming and going, coming and going ... at least one adorable guy was always here, next to me, by my heart.

Two hours later, Mum and I left the Queen Mary Hospital. Sitting in the minibus, I stared at the dark grey sky. Despite the overcast, I could still glimpse the shimmering full moon. It was like an amulet, walking me back home.

In Contemplation

Toothbrush paints the white walls with
white hair gel, to and fro, rinsing water is poured
in and out in swirl that starts a journey
drill along an underground tunnel. The white
sour, congregated floating pieces, the falling
opaque waterfall, smash and immerse
the stars that soften in juicy mist, sluggishly paralyzed.
A light strand of short line, sticky with mascara
drifts downwards, left to right
into the foggy galaxy suspending lazy stars,
feathery, vanishes into a black hole
down into a deep contracting tunnel ... down down down
then I hear a flushing sound.

Ivy TAI Yeuk-wai

Dying Haven

It starts off from the azure—
Feathers falling off his wings
and he diminishes
in between the clouds and seas.

Across the satin-shining ocean,
he gazes at his reflection.
The breeze brushes his feathers,
lifting him from the sapphire to his forest.

Alas! It is not the trees he used to know—
They scorch with savage ruby glows
on their hairs, yelling for salvation.
He gapes the wrath of the fireballs—
engulfing his playground of preys.

The smoke blurs and chokes him—
the mist before his eyes
forbids him to look forward.
He scoots to the scorched rim,
staring at the unending-graveyard
of clay and granite.

There he sets off again
to seek for the Emerald of Life
in the Promised Realm.
There he will

unite his sire and siblings
in the place of no tears
for every pulse that died.

Christine WONG Ho-yan

The Trip

Jasmine Lai Jing Yee

My father and I spent our summer vacation near the sea in the year when I was eight. It was in the eighties. And my father was an art teacher by then. I could not recall how we made the decision, but I remembered that the original destination of our trip was Honolulu. My father said I should see the world, and Honolulu was the best place.

We ended up in a hotel somewhere along the Atlantic coast. It was a hotel for senior citizens and retired couples. My father was furious. He called the agency and shouted and yelled and roared and then he slapped the phone onto the wall, which ended the conversation. I could not understand some of his words, but I was sure that Mommy would not like this, because the people all around my father stared at him. After he came out of the restroom, my father said that we would return home immediately, but I said I would like to stay, and I was famished. He said he would think about it. After the tea in the restaurant, my father headed towards the counter and asked for a room.

The owner of the hotel was John. John reminded me of He-man, my favorite cartoon hero, and he still does. He had broad shoulders, huge hands and arms as strong as He-man's. Whenever he stood up, he looked like a bear to me. However, I found his ponytail too funny to be worn by a fighter. Besides, I'd never seen him fight. He loved ironing bed sheets and preparing meals, so he left the book and the bar to his wife, Lucy. I liked Lucy the better, because she would always talk to me and leave caramel and candy bars under my pillow. She would not play catch with me as John usually did, but she told me stories about the hotel and the whereabouts of its secret corners.

On the third day, we dined in the hotel restaurant. My father

ordered the crabs and I the fish and chips. He seemed to be much more composed after we settled down. He started a painting of the seaside and the swimmers, but left it in the bedroom for two days. At first I thought that he would try to leave as soon as possible, but later I guessed he found this a great place to have a break from the school and our messy apartment. My father did not say much at dinner. And he merely nodded his head when I said that there was too much vegetable in the chowder. He did not say much, but he asked a lot of questions. He asked me if I had completed my homework. I said yes, and then he returned to his crabs. He later asked if I liked the place, I said I did, and he had a drink of water. After he finished the crabs, he asked if teachers were good to me, I said we were on vacation, and he shoved the shells away.

By the time my father made me finish my dinner, he went over to the bar. Lucy was surprised when she saw my father taking a seat in front of her, but she turned around and started to prepare the glass.

I cleaned my mouth with the tablecloth, as the napkin dropped onto the floor. I looked at my father, made sure that he was not looking at me, and began to count the fruit drops Mrs. Smartley had given me. She was the old lady living next door and she once offered to be my nanny while my father was out fishing. Fifteen. I could have three a day in the morning, afternoon and after dinner. But I was not sure if I could keep to three a day. I thought Mrs. Smartley would not mind giving me more, as I was the only child she was ever going to meet in a short period of time. I picked one with green apple flavor, unwrapped it, and put the rest into the side pockets of my shorts.

As I turned to get off the chair, I stopped. Instead, I remained seated on the chair, and looked at my father, who was drinking alone at the bar. I remembered this was the first time ever for me to have

the chance, and the distance, to have a good look at my father, since Mommy passed away. In the past three months, he was always by my side. In the hospital, the church, the shiny black car with all the tissue boxes stacked behind the passenger's seats, the cemetery, at home, in the bathroom, in my bedroom ... In those days, I was not sure if it was me who followed him around or it was he who brought me with him to everywhere he went. He was sitting with his back to me, slightly bent over the bar. While his right elbow rested on the bench, his left hand supported his body by pressing against his left thigh. It seemed exhausting, as if he would fall without pressing it hard enough. His legs hung in the air, regardless of the stepping rail right in front of them.

While I was watching my father, a man stormed out of the kitchen and walked in my direction. Though the first impression I had of this man differed a lot from what I later learnt about him, it is important to make it clear that the first sight of him frightened me. The old gentleman moved swiftly, and he was as tall as a lamppost. The bearded lamppost carried with him a walking stick, but it did not really serve him as he swirled it in the air, and this made him look like a grown up David, swirling a stone and approaching a much shorter Goliath. When the grown up David was two feet from me, he stopped. I expected he would do harm to me before my father could even stand up, but he bent down and picked up my napkin.

“Son, you look frightened.” He had a look at me and said.

I was frightened. But I remembered Mommy said that I should introduce myself and shake hands when I meet someone. So I held out my right hand.

“My name is Luke, sir. Nice to meet you.” I stuttered.

He smirked. Impressed by my clumsy self-introduction, he held

out his hand. “Hi Luke, Bob. You could call me Bob.”

I knew something went wrong as soon as we began to shake hands. It was the green apple fruit drop. It melted in my hand in the past few minutes. And now it melted between our hands.

The man felt it within seconds. “What’s this slime?” He raised his hand to his nose. “It smelts like green apple. It’s not the jelly they serve tonight. Is it?” Bob frowned at our hands and cleaned them with the napkin he picked from the floor.

“No,” I said, “it was my fruit drop, I have been holding it for quite a few minutes. I am sorry.” If this happened at school, I would surely be seeing my parents in the principle’s office. I would be sitting in a huge and uncomfortable chair, placed at the middle of two infuriated and embarrassed adults who would wish that they were not there. But no. I was in a hotel, talking to a man I had never met and explaining to him that it was not a trick, and he believed me. A few minutes later, I knew something more about Bob. He was seventy-seven years old and he liked fruit drops too. We agreed to meet again on the next day.

It rained on the next day. Bob and I met in the lobby and I led him upstairs to the storeroom. We discussed the possibilities of playing a number of games, and finally decided to play that of my favorite. Bob agreed to play the role of Darth Vader while I resumed my role of He-man. Bob said that Darth Vader and He-man lived in different galaxies, but it was possible for Darth Vader to travel to the Earth to fight with He-man if that was what I desired. We fought in the storeroom and tried not to knock things down or hurt each other. Bob could not help laughing at the beginning, but he soon concentrated and he did not disappoint me. Instead, he fought so well that he was more like Skywalker than Darth Vader. After the game, we shared my sweets and Bob told me stories about himself and his family. He grew up in

a farm and went to war after high school. When he managed to get back, he fell in love with the young lady working in the laundry and married her. He said that his father-in-law liked him because he grew up in a farm and he had been to the war and he was a hard working and decent fellow. Bob said that life was difficult in those years, but he and his wife never lost hope. They believed in God and that God helps people who are tough. Two years after they married, they had a son. And that was when Bob decided to start a business. Bob did not tell me how he started his business or what kind of business it was, but he said that it was his life. When he finally finished, Bob said that he would like to know more about me too. So I told my new friend that I was eight but about to be nine in seven months and I thought I would go to war when there was a war. My friend laughed at the idea and said that my mommy would be as angry as his when he declared that he had joined the army. I explained to him that my mommy had passed away, I guessed she should be in Heaven, and as I could change my clothing by myself and make myself breakfast, I would take good care of myself in the battlefield. Bob was surprised that Mommy was dead, and that my father alone had brought me to the hotel. So I told him about the mistake of the agency, and Bob said that he had never come across any agency that sent people to the east when all they wanted was to go to the west. He said that Honolulu was an island, and I might like to visit the place only when I was older. I told him that I preferred the hotel to any place in the world; it was just that there was too much vegetable in the chowder. Later I told him about the nurses and doctors I met in Mommy's hospital where she spent her last few months, the games Mommy and I played in her room, and the names of flowers that I knew because of my father's habit of bringing Mommy a bunch of flowers everyday. After I finished describing the colors and scents

of different flowers, we fell into silence.

The silence did not last for long. It was broken by my sounds of weeping and Bob's soft whispers of "cry as hard as you want". He wiped my tears away with a pillow case he snatched from the shelves, and hugged me for a very long time. Bob told me a number of jokes when I stopped crying, then he promised to bring me some photos of his wife and their children. Before I left for lunch with my father, Bob said that his wife had also passed away in the previous year, and that my father must have loved my mommy very much.

The next day Bob showed me the photos of his wife and their children. The photos were taken years ago when he was still in his forties. His look in the photo seemed strangely familiar to me, but as I recall, I had not seen him before the summer. Bob also showed me the photo of his children in which they were having a birthday party, and it reminded me of the birthday party I had in the hospital, when Mommy's room was crowded with dozens of doctors and nurses singing the birthday song. Bob regretted showing me the photo, but I said it was okay, and I liked the photos. We spent the later half of the day walking along the beach, inspecting the sea with a pair of binoculars, searching for signs of sharks.

My father seemed to be in a very good mood on that day. In the evening, he showed me his completed painting of the swimmers and told me about his new plans. He was excited about the plans and kept saying that maybe we should go back as soon as possible to start working on his paintings. At dinner, I told him what I did with Bob. My father laughed when I told him Bob's jokes and what Bob taught me about the manners in using binoculars, such as never directing the binoculars to ladies lying on the beach. When I came to mention the fun we had on the beach spotting for sharks, my father told me that

he once saw a shark. He talked about this experience and some other funnier things that happened in his years in college. When we finished our dinner, he left for the bar but was back in a minute. He brought with him a bottle of wine and a glass. When I asked if I could have a glass too, he said no, but I could sip a little. When I was sipping the wine, I threw a glance at Lucy, who was looking at me in disbelief, and I was really proud of myself when my father told me that I did not blush, not even a little.

We did not sleep until three in that following morning. We shared stories about Mommy, and after serious consideration, I forced my father to tell me how they met. A bit drunk, he told me how they met and the story of how he impressed my grandma with drawing a picture of Mommy's family in sixty seconds. My father then fell onto the bed, deep into sleep, smiling.

In the next morning, we woke up at eleven and packed our bags. I met Bob in the lobby and promised that I would write him when I got home. Before we left, he handed me an envelope and told me not to open it before I got home.

When my father and I were home, we started tidying my parent's bedroom and the storeroom. What we found in the storeroom were clothing of different sizes that Mommy bought for me. My father said that Mommy was always making fun of his taste, so he guessed she wanted me to look smart even when she was gone. My father then spent the whole day reading the letters that Mommy kept in a shoebox, which was decorated with my tiny footprints and handprints.

In the years that followed, Bob and I kept writing to each other. We commented on the episodes of Star Wars and He-man, and he was pleased that I developed an interest in astrology. I have not been to Honolulu, and my father, busy with painting, never suggested going

to Honolulu again.

Through these years, I am still keeping Bob's first letter. I keep it in my shoebox, with all the photos of my family, and some letters mommy wrote to me. By the time I showed it to my wife, she asked me what did Bob mean by telling his son to cook a better pot of chowder, and I smiled.

Necrophilia

The empty cave of silent candles rest
the perfect princess and her loyal slave—
two hearts but one could beat, infest.
Was heaven blurred, by breath of hell in grave

Last time thy wrist I bowed to touch presented
The warmth of Ammon, drained and dried my brain—
Though now it's cold, be you my unintended
Protect my scars from Hate, from Ruthless Rain.

As a slave, I daren't possess thy body,
yet my desire has overtaken Will.
My love has meant to keep my dignity
Now lost, I sacrifice myself until

When blood of mine creates our bed of lust
We'll fuse forever, ever, ashes, and dust.

Venom YEUNG Shing-tak

The "Dialogue"

I lay still on a flat pane
appreciating my shining face
luring the curious eyes to stare at me.
The marathon of images I spell out
jumps across the air particles
and reaches you.

you wonder in the clustered and clumsy web
Viewing and touching and moving and
Click—
you chat with numbers and letters.
Scratching and pulling the distanced touch
and beg with a glassy-eyed stare

I weave a silky prison to
lock you up
I celebrate when your mind is jammed
you crawl among the crowds and are lost
in the pace of the footsteps non-stopped
your cat's eyes shimmer and
wake you up from hysteria.

your vibrating vocal cords can't quiver
the chilling vacuum,
but bury yourself in the heavy tick-tock.
The rainwater knives across the noisy silence.
you click and grab the zealous response.

The dog yawns.
you fade in the darkness.

Jenny LAU Yuen-yu

AWAKE

Wai Yun Yun

Ah Yiu woke up in shock. In that foggy unknown world her chest and ribs were so extensively, yet silently pressed against that she was neither pushed to scream or to vomit. Her breathe involuntarily descended in strength that at the moment she reached breathlessness, a stroke swiftly brought back her consciousness. She was dazed by her own grasping and the cold sweat that slipped down her forehead.

Ah Yiu once heard of a rumor about Mr. Shum – a forty-year-old, or forty something, or maybe fifty-year-old single man who taught lower forms Mathematics – from her students that Mr. Shum targeted to courtship the new female teaching staff at the beginning of each school year. *Each* school year. No one knew when his courtship marathon started, but it was believed Mr. Shum’s undaunted sportsmanship was originated from his firm confidence in his attractiveness and his charm. Ah Yiu believed the students had transmitted such piece of knowledge for thousands of times; but she could not understand why the students could still laugh at the same joke every time they told. ‘Miss Lee, did Mr. Shum ask you to dine with him?’ The students inquired for the truthfulness of the legend. It was of course both problematic for Ah Yiu to answer yes or no in front of her students. She was more tactful than Mr. Shum; she would not leave any tails for her students to create a legend for her. Mr. Shum was for sure not Ah Yiu’s cup of tea; her instinct told when she first entered the staff room years ago. But Ah Yiu thought what Mr. Shum did was normal enough. Actually Ah Yiu scanned every new male teaching staff at the beginning of each school

term. But Ah Yiu chose to give up all these possibilities at the second week of every September.

The new school IT technician was assigned to sit in front of Ah Yiu. One could not say he was handsome, nor was he outstanding. But in a girls' school, every young man seemed to be a fountain in a desert. Whenever the Student Association held functions, all young unmarried men must be invited to perform. Some SA girls asked Ah Yiu to be the adjudicator for the singing contest when they met her in the corridor. But once the new technician showed up, he distracted all the girls' attention. The girls talked and talked so that Ah Yiu thought it was not worth it for her to speak a word lest she should be thought to compete for the man's attention. Despite the girls' untrained persuasion, their enthusiasm already moved the young man to do whatever they asked for. Ah Yiu was replaced as adjudicator. So the young man said sorry to Ah Yiu after the girls left. 'My name's Daniel,' the guy said, and he started asking her all the trivial facts of the school.

I knew Daniel was paving the way for a dinner invitation. I knew not his dispositions but my brain had already started to write a love story for both of us. I had never ceased to think about love. But I could just pick up and match some scenes or symbols to exercise my fantasy. I formed my 'love stories' from collages within my cognitive scope. I planned of various kinds of scenes that 'he' and I met for the next few times - maybe there would be some kinds of coincidence in the following days, or he might arrange some romantic encounters. But when the further development of our love was beyond my cognitive

boundary, that part of our love was white – blank. And the very basic fact was that I could just imagine him from the people I knew. I knew not his dispositions at all. The men in TV dramas were too unrealistic. But I could not control myself from longing for a man who knew piano or violin; the typical talented gentleman in popular novels. I hoped that he might graduate from a traditional boys' school, or might be very filial to his strict mother. Only possibilities like these would prevent him from having too much love experience. Hopefully I was his first love. If he had had too many girlfriends, he might abhor my dullness.

Ah Yiu understood very well that her passivity was nurtured by her mother. From a very young age nearly all of their dialogue was composed of her complaint, which was in the kind of pause-less low and deep monotonous Buddhist like murmur. Naah-moh, naah-moh, naah-mooh, naah-mooh, naah-mooh, naah-mooh. At first Ah Yiu cried for her deficiency in satisfying her widowed mother. Ah Yiu stayed at home during Christmas and birthdays. Yet her mother blamed Ah Yiu for not listening to her pressure when Ah Yiu studied in her room. 'You did not even care about any of my school work,' Ah Yiu rebuked her in her mind. Ah Yiu swallowed and swallowed her words, as well as her sorrow. That always happened in her life. She gained the survival skill of not saying a word when her mother clashed the dishes and bowls to make 'clank clank' sounds every night after cooking, murmuring that she ate all the food she cooked by herself. Gradually Ah Yiu grew resistant to any of her attempts to gain attention, so that she could not need to cry. Now Ah Yiu no longer imagined that her mother would understand her one day, nor would she hear a word of love and appreciation from her mother.

Aunt Lena visited Ah Yiu's mother once a month after she got married. She chatted with Ah Yiu's mother to cheer her up, hoping to compensate for leaving her sister alone due to her marriage. Aunt Lena was a typical rebellious girl in the past - came home at midnight, went to bars and was mad about dancing. She smoked sometimes but she did it in secret as she avoided it being discovered by her sister. Aunt Lena brought bunches of flowers and gifts home several times a month. Ah Yiu had seen different men accompanying her home. Now the aunt sitting in front of Ah Yiu was a typical middle-aged family woman. Unstylish hair style in black colour and no skirts shorter than the knees. And after she gave birth to her son, Ah Yiu could not see her youthful exuberance any more.

'Yiu, got a boyfriend yet? Give up your job as early as you can. There're plenty of choices for you anywhere other than your dumb school. Don't you think of marriage? Well, but I say, women are more treasured when they're single. You may think this is a cliché, but it is the truth.' Aunt Lena's smile seemed implying that she was exceptional.

Daniel asked me to go out several times since his apology. I wanted to avoid being seen with him in the school. I looked down to the floor when I sensed he was around. But then he met me at the entrance of the teachers' room several times.

Daniel knew every short cut to the destination. I could not remember

how he got there. And Daniel knew where to eat among the food stalls on the Lamma Island. Each woman in the shop went blah blah blah like machine guns to persuade us, and they endlessly showed us the shrimps and fishes in the tank though we passed the tanks without any sympathy neither to the women or to the swimming creatures. I loved to walk by his side, feeling kind of protected in the chaos when he rejected the ladies' invitation for me. The sense of completion, or the sense of wholeness, I did not know how to tell, substantiates me. And I had never imagined in my own love stories that it could be a dream-like scene to have seafood on the Lamma Island. I nearly confirmed that I should say yes if Daniel asked me to be his girlfriend, when I saw the stunningly ravishingly orange red sun and the dyed clouds diminish into the sea. I kept telling myself I was naïve enough to perceive the sun as a prophetic sign to validate our relationship. But could there be a relationship that is blessed to be aided by the sky?

Again, a surprise, that Daniel knew Symborska. We walked along the sea and he recited the first stanza of *Love at First Sight*

Both are convinced

That a sudden surge of emotion bound them together

Beauty is such a certainty

But uncertainty is more beautiful.

At that few seconds when he looked into my eyes, I was dazzled in a vague feeling of existence. He held my hand and I did not draw it away.

In the next few days Daniel brought Ah Yiu to the Peak, Sai Kung, and many other places Ah Yiu had never been in the New Territories. They saw each other every day and when one day they had nowhere

to explore, Ah Yiu was invited to Daniel's home. In the next few days Daniel not only touched Ah Yiu's hand, his lips began to touch Ah Yiu's eyebrows, ears and lips. And when he had touched everywhere in the head and the neck, he explored the other parts of her.

In fact Daniel would not know all these things: that Ah Yiu chose Daniel because she reached 'the age', thinking that she really ought to find somebody. There was no especially suitable person around her and one crucial factor was that Daniel dated her. He did not know piano or violin, he had never declared his love in front of her friends but he was actually not that bad. After three months Ah Yiu's heart did not beat fast when she saw Daniel. After half year she did not need him to accompany her home. They never kissed any where else except in Daniel's home. They were never seen hand in hand or never dashed across the zebra crossing together as her young student lovers did. She did not need something dramatic to affirm their love. She believed there was another kind of love. A love that could go on despite insipid episodes.

I believed that when there was love, there was tolerance. More love, more tolerance. This was one of the beliefs in my teaching. Probably my students would not understand my rationale. I hoped someday they would treasure my tolerance. But if they did not, it did not matter. Love did not ask for rewards. Similarly I did not think Mother would understand why I still chose to stay with her when I was free. My friends knew very well that I would not go out. But even if I were given a chance, I would still choose to be with her. I would not deny

that I still got some kind of hope or dream or wish that one day she would be moved, that one day she would be happier if she understood in fact she had a filial daughter and she did not need to dwell on what she was scanty of. I admitted I still cried sometimes when I heard her blaming. But when I cried, I knew I still loved her.

On the Valentine's day Ah Yiu hid herself at home to correct the essays of her students. On that day Daniel did not give a phone call to Ah Yiu. She looked up at the clock, it was already eleven fifty. She did not think she had missed anything. When she hid herself in the tranquil world, she felt that there was not much difference between passing a day alone or with another person.

And Ah Yiu believed there was a kind of love that was built up by decades of marriage.

'Will you marry me?' Ah Yiu asked when she and Daniel were smiling in front of the sticker photo taking machine.

'What?' Daniel frowned, 'did you say marriage? We?'

'Look at the camera, don't look at me,' Ah Yiu faced the camera, looking stiff.

They remained silence.

'I want to go home,' Ah Yiu did not mind being the first one to break the embarrassment even if she was actually very much disappointed. But she was looking to the floor, as she did when she sensed Daniel's presence during his courtship.

'Come on, Yiu, it was so sudden that I thought you were joking or I heard it wrong.

‘I think that’s an excuse.’

‘Hmmm...ah...well...I wonder why you ask about it?’

I left Daniel. I had never heard of such a worse reply for a marriage proposal. I left him as I knew any more words would do nothing to alter the situation. Could you trust him if he promised to marry me sometime say, when he had saved enough money for our future? If he had never thought of a marriage, do you think I’m capable of forcing him to change his mind? If I complained or lost temper or started any kind of quarrel, it would be too stupid for me to leave a scar or a bad image in our relationship. Coercion was the most ineffective means to an end. Coercion meant that one party did not volunteer to do something. Not volunteer to do something. I guessed Aunt Lena understood this very well. Her husband proposed a divorce, and she signed the document after a year of separation. Things of course could turn out to be something very much out of your expectation, even if you had already paid your greatest effort. Aunt Lena was, to me, very willing to transform herself to be a proper decent wife. I did not know how she overcame those heart-broken times, but in the end she did not force her husband to leave the other woman. Three months before her official divorce, Aunt Lena went to Italy. Her son was looked after by my mother.

Days were back to normal. Daniel and Ah Yiu did not talk about the marriage or Ah Yiu’s silent left outside the photo taking kiosk. They were still working in the government-sponsored secondary school, correcting essays at home, going to Daniel’s home, watching

films in the cinemas that were far away from the school and, avoiding being seen together by the school people.

Even though Ah Yiu did not remind Daniel about the proposal, she herself had thought of all possibilities that could happen if she really got married.

‘Mum, what do you think if I have a boyfriend?’

‘Up to you. I know you have thought of leaving this home for years.’

‘No, I don’t mean that.’

‘Look at your aunt. Ask her about the moral of her story yourself.’

‘Mum, she had already done her best.’

‘Just do whatever you’d like to, if you don’t listen to me.’

‘Mum, it’s not possible for me to stay here alone for all my life. I won’t leave you even if I get married. I can live around here so that I can visit you frequently.’

‘No thanks.’

‘Mum, I raise this issue just because I respect you and want to listen to you.’

‘Okay. Now listen. I tell you that you do not need to pity me. You can leave this home any time you like. After all you must leave me one day. I understand it since your father’s deceased. Before you leave, the only thing you have to do is to leave this flat to me.’

‘Of course, it is already yours.’

‘No, half of it. Give me the other half. You will support your husband your son and your own family. And you won’t care about whether I am dead or alive. What can I rely on, if I cannot make a

living myself? Everybody can leave me right away. I only have this flat. You can still work and support yourself for thirty years more. But I can't when I grow old soon. No one can tell if you'll still take care of me. You may even want to take all my money if your husband abandons you. What am I expected to do if both you and your aunt ask me for money?'

This was the first time Ah Yiu realized that her mother cherished her own and her money more than anything else in her home. Not their relationship, let alone love. Ah Yiu was so confused that she could not get asleep. Her mother's words lingered in the air. The time she wept was the only time she was temporarily not troubled by what her mother had said. But once she stopped the sob, the words flooded her ears. 'Give me the other half.' 'You won't care if I am dead or alive.' 'Give me – the other half.'

When she cried to exhaustion Ah Yiu fell into unconsciousness. In that foggy unknown world her chest and ribs were so extensively, yet silently pressed against that she was neither pushed to scream or to vomit.

On the next morning she woke up in shock. She was dazed by her own grasping and the cold sweat that slipped down her forehead. Drifted away from the bed, she combed, brushed, and dressed up. The vague helplessness in the dream returned when she was alone in lift.

She called Daniel to make a sick leave for her. But he did not answer the call.

'What am I doing all through my life?' her mind said.

Ah Yiu did not hear any sounds in the street. She was like protected in vacuum glass. The faces of each pedestrian blurred. She continued

drifting among crowds.

‘What am I doing all through my life?’ her mind said.

These few days the air was instilled with the smell of decaying iron rod. Ah Yiu spent the days within UA Shatin. She watched the 9:50 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 5: 45p.m., and 9:15p.m. *The Hours*. On the first day she did not know what the film was about but she kept bursting into tears. On the second day she cried for Julianne Moore and Meryl Streep. On the third day she decided to learn driving. She was especially fascinated by the scene in which Julianne Moore drove her car to commit suicide. The next day Ah Yiu bought ten pieces of camisoles in various colours, thinking that she had had too many white grey khaki shirts and long dresses in her wardrobe. That morning she needed one of her friends to substitute her job for three months.

Ah Yiu put the ten camisoles in the luggage so she could fully embrace the sun in Greece and then she did not forget to buy a sunflower for her trip.

On the day she sat off, Aunt Lena, Daniel and her mother received a bunch of flowers from Ah Yiu, each with a thank you card informing them her long vacation.

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

Yiu

A Futile Day

Morning drops diamonds onto the river.
The reflection of a multi-eyed creature
Lingers and shimmers on the trap.

When the stars become
Brighter without the Sun,
Nothing is blacker
Than the face of the water monster.
Only water passes through the gate,
But there is no trace of
A single hair from the delicious children.

So the hungry hands burn their work.

Dammit.

Katrina YEUNG Fei-fei

Disqualified Lover

My love
has passed away.
I let the packed memories
Unpack.
They were your legacy.

Not long ago,
I enamored you.
The first seafood spaghetti from you
Was not perfect, but the
tones of seriousness, sincerity—
You charmed me with this clue.

Someone told me,
“A man seeks his lost rib
to complete himself”.
I knew I was your rib
The only rib that could fit your body.

We played games, the games that even
a 2-year-old kid knows how to play
We raced not to call each other.
to see who could tolerate
the silence and the vast distance.
No rules of games were ever fair
You won in laughter,
Freezing laughter.

You were a censor, meaner.
You examined the cargoes of love.
You checked every box
to ensure it was not overloaded.
But you never banned those containers
which were empty or unfilled.
You let them export
to my port.

You were dull
Or you were deaf?
The chirpings beside a still lake,
the horseplay during endless thunderstorms
nothing emerged in your eyes,
Should I get a qualification
Before I get a boarding pass of anger?

I was not ashamed.
I was a customer
who complained your service was inefficient,
I was a woman
who roared in the crowd,
being stared, labeled as insane.
I was a mountain climber
who wailed at the mountain top
after getting the championship.
No regard I got.
I was acting a monologue.

Finally, I found a bone-shaped piece of wood,
carved:

*You are someone's rib,
but not mine.*

Elaine CHEUNG Sau-ling

Douglas's Eyes

Sonia Siu

Eyes can tell *all*, because they are windows to the soul. However, no one ever saw through Douglas's windows—they were all streaked and infuriatingly elusive. In fact, his windows were shut and locked tight twenty four seven, or thereabouts.

For many years, I had tried to be exceptionally patient and understanding with my little brother, Douglas, but time and again, I failed. I wasn't even close enough to playing the role of a big sister. I had scarcely ever, in fact, asked Douglas anything.

"Doug!" I barked at the top of my lungs. Douglas raised his head from his sea of toys and looked at me for a few seconds. "Get your skinny butt over here!" Douglas crawled out of his toys and scratched his head. "What the hell is this?" I asked, pointing my finger at the Wellcome plastic bag hanging on a clothes rod, dripping with water.

"Uh... you told me to hang the thing last night, I —"

"I told you to hang it so the retractable umbrella would dry off!"

"I did... hang it up." He looked out of the window, staring aimlessly off into the distance, his hand was wriggling the head of his favorite armless robot.

I took a long deep breath. "Did you even use your brain? How the hell can the umbrella dry off if it's sitting in this soaking bag! You are so dumb! I shoulda known! You never do things right!" I rolled my eyes and pulled the bag down hard. The umbrella fell on the pool of water. "Damn, it smells foul and stale like a dead fish."

Ducky's shoulders slumped, his chin on his chest. He was holding the robot tight. "Er... You didn't tell me to get that out. You said—"

"You are impossible! Did I even have to ask?"

“But sister —”

“No more silly talk!”

Douglas threw his head back and looked at his toys. It was clear that he wanted to go back to them, but he was not sure if this whole thing was over and done with, so he stood there for another couple of minutes, watching me cleaning the mess.

I always knew that I couldn't count on my seven-year-old brother to help with anything, because even simple tasks anyone assigned him could go completely wrong and insane. I had to yell at Douglas when he did stupid things, I just couldn't help it. However, I never meant to take it out on him. If I took the time to get in his face and issue a lecture, I did so because I felt that he was worth my time and energy. In fact, I just wanted to straighten him out, to make him grow up faster. Because the time would come when our folks and I wouldn't be around, keeping him from falling. And when the time came, no one would watch Ducky's back and help him get safely through this freakish and broken world, a world where people only live for themselves. I knew it was wrong to communicate my anger and anxiety to Douglas, who was already, as his kindergarten teachers said, “untypical.”

It wasn't surprising that Douglas was small, as if he was undernourished, after all, he was just a little boy, and he might grow up to be a big and decent man someday. However, Douglas was not the kind of kid people would want to cuddle and hold in their arms. He'd been wearing the same old wrong and unfashionable clothes that looked nonsensically loose on him for years. His fingernails were badly bitten and were always black, and he had slightly hunched shoulders of a beaten doggie. Besides, either Mom had no aesthetic judgment whatsoever, or she didn't give a damn about how Douglas felt walking on the streets with his forever greasy uncombed mushroom-like hair

style. In fact, you'd have thought Mom plopped a soup bowl down flat over his head and trimmed his hair little by little along the brim of the bowl.

Anyhow, Douglas didn't have to say or do anything to make quite an impression on people at first sight. Rather, it was his behavior that said something about him. When I was younger, there were moments I fooled myself into believing that the Douglas we had been living with for 7 years was a mistake, that the real Douglas was somehow mixed up with other babies, and Mom took the wrong and stupid one home.

"The doctors said Doug might be a sped," Mom told Dad when dinner was almost over, as if Douglas and I were invisible.

"Huh? What ped?"

"Sped," Mom repeated. "Special Education student. They think Doug is learning disabled or emotionally disturbed or lazy, they're not sure. If Doug is a sped, they said his learning needs can't be met by a standard school curriculum, and he's going to have a hard time catching up with his peers, both physically and academically. They said they have to do some more tests to —"

"Tests! We don't have no spare money for tests, and we don't have no money to get him the therapy he needs or change school!" Then Dad took a large gulp of his beer, crumpled the can and tossed it behind. "He's just stupid, he's not a ped."

I couldn't understand either. "Douglas might be lazy, but he can't be retarded. It just couldn't have happened," I thought. I was there in the hospital with Dad, seeing Ducky the first time when he was pushed out of the delivery room in a nursery carrier. He was wriggling his tiny body under the blankets, and I could see his lovely paws. Besides, I watched him take his very first step on this earth. He was walking from Mom to me, and I got him the moment he fell on me. Douglas might

not be a genius, but he surely was normal.

Sometimes Douglas told me things, but I didn't take his words seriously, because children don't talk anything important.

"Sister sister, I went to the park with Wong Wong today. There were new swings!" Douglas said, pulling my elbow.

"Yeh? Who's this Wong Wong?" I asked.

"He's a friend. He lives at the end of the village."

The word "friend" caught my attention. What did he know about friends anyway? He might not even have friends though. His classmates never called and asked him about homework, he never made any phone calls either. Even neighborhood kids didn't hang out with him. "Very nice," I said, "now put that robot down and go do your homework."

"Sister, I was –"

"I can't talk now, I must finish this tonight." I returned to my piles of books and notes spread throughout my desk and my bed.

As much as we tried to deny it, Douglas's series of learning difficulties unfolded over the past few years. He not only failed every class in school, but he was mysteriously quiet and shy. His face never betrayed emotion, except when he got frightened. He never cracked a smile, he never looked at people, and he didn't like being touched. Poor Ducky was wrapped up in some impenetrable black cloud, and I was unable to reach him.

Anyhow, it had taken years for us to come to terms with the inescapable realization that we could never expect perfection of Douglas – there simply was no chance of him ever becoming a prodigy or something big and great, something that every parent would wish their little ones to be. Even now, Doug's handwriting was illegible. He had to write with a soft triangular finger grip slipped on to a thick pencil, the kind of pencil designed for kids who had just learned to write, only

Douglas had learned to write for years and still had difficulty grasping and holding pencils.

Dad always said “having children is a long-term investment”, “the more, the better”. He had his golden rules for bringing up kids. “Raising kids is just like keeping dogs. You just have to feed them and teach them some tricks.” Well, Dad fed us, and put us through school. He went on, “they won’t die easily, not even if they get into fistfights that result in jaw deformity and nosebleed. They survive.” After Douglas, Dad wanted another child to “secure” his investment. However, doctors said that Mom had a heart condition and her body couldn’t withstand a pregnancy. Though I had never been good with math, it was a straight-forward equation which really couldn’t get any simpler: Roughly half of Dad’s investment had gone straight to the bottom of the sea.

One Sunday afternoon, I was cleaning up my room and throwing away the old stuff. After mission accomplished, I lay on my bed, soaked with sweat and dust, thinking about having an ice cream. The mini store in our village sold the best waffle cones, with two large scoops scooped into them. I went to get Douglas, but he wasn’t in his room, and he wasn’t in the toilet or the back of the “garden”. His favorite armless robot was on the table.

“Mom.”

“Ya?”

“Where is Douglas?”

“Ya.”

As always, Mom was on the phone, talking with some nosy woman over trivial daily matters.

“Mom!”

“Shhh!” She held out her palm, signaling me not to speak.

“Mom,” I was annoyed. “Douglas was mauled by a street dog.”

She wasn’t even listening. So I went out to the porch and looked out. Douglas, in his flip-flops, was dragging a bag of something behind him. I could recognize his back.

“Douglas!” I yelled. But he was too far away to hear me. I quickly jumped on my bike and took off after him. “Where on earth is he going?”

The trail leading to the end of the village was cracked and bumpy. It was so grimy that even weeds didn’t have the perseverance to grow there. Then I arrived in the middle of nothingness. I looked around three hundred and sixty degrees, but Douglas was nowhere to be seen.

“What the... He couldn’t have gone too far. I didn’t see him make any turns. Where did he go?!” I might as well turn around and leave, but it didn’t feel right, and I’d be wracked by guilt if something tragic happened to Douglas.

What was also in that middle of nothingness was an isolated and dilapidated wooden house, surrounded by rusty wire fences, abandoned lots and storage facilities, all with broken windows, dingy and peeling paint. Not a living soul around.

I was frozen there for a minute. Everyone knew that house, and no one went near it. It was the oldest and creepiest thing in the village, and it was haunted. One such rumor was that the house was built on the site of wartime massacres. No one saw anyone went in, or out of that house. Douglas knew those stories too, so he should have been anywhere on earth, except that house.

As a kid, when there was nothing better to do, I could always find something to entertain myself. It was so much fun “playing” with Douglas. He believed in everything I said, and he was easily fooled. We didn’t play hide-and-seek, we talked ghost stories. I told Doug

Santa Claus was just a silly old myth, but ghosts were real. After some months, ghosts had gotten into his head, and we believed in ghosts and malevolent wandering spirits.

“Doug,” I grabbed him by his shoulders.

“Don’t touch me,” he said, shrugging off my hands.

“Doug,” my voice was trembling. “There’s something in your room.”

“I don’t like you.” He said. “You always say that to scare me.”

“No, it’s true this time,” I sounded honest and assured. “Something is in here.”

“No! I don’t see anything.” Douglas came close to me, squeezing my hand tight.

“There is a woman dressed in red, floating in the air behind you.” Douglas turned his head around. “No!” I shouted. Douglas was startled. “Don’t look!” I whispered. “If you look at her, she’ll possess you and you’ll vanish into the thin air!” Then I walked to the door, he ran after me, but I got out and held the door closed from the outside.

“Sister! Let me out!” Douglas started to whine.

“No, I can’t, it’s locked from the inside!” I said helplessly, covering half of my smirking mouth.

“Sister!” Douglas was wailing.

A few seconds later, it was all quiet. I slowly turned the knob and peeked inside, Douglas was huddling on his bed, with his blanket wrapping him tight.

“Douglas?” I hopped on his bed, pretending to save him from the red woman. “It’s okay. It’s gone. C’mon!” He was weeping, so I stroke his head. “Stupido.”

I know. It was wicked of me to harass and curse at Douglas, to poke fun at things I obviously thought was funny and entertaining.

However, it was the only way to make him speak up. Otherwise, he wasn't just stupid, he'd be a mute too.

“Argggh!”

That brought me back to the reality and gave me a few extra heartbeats. My eyes widened with horror, and my mouth agape. That was Douglas. I couldn't have heard it wrong. I frantically looked around, spotted a hole in the wire fence and ducked through it.

There, I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. The other side of the broken windowpanes was a completely different world. It was a room with simple décor and furniture, lit with kerosene lamps. A giant dark shadow was leaping out from the corner. I was appalled. It was a scary dog, as big as a bear, big enough to bite Doug's arm off. I gasped.

The bear-like dog flew at Doug and they tumbled down to the floor in a tangle, bouncing and having fun. The dog was panting and wriggling its tail like a propeller. Doug was giggling and clutching its tree-trunk fluffy neck. It was licking Doug's face, particularly his lips, voraciously.

“Wong Wong, NOOO!” Douglas yelled, half laughing and half screaming.

“You gotta be kidding me,” I thought, “that Wong Wong is his friend?! For a dog this size is a must to be muzzled and leashed. It's a dangerous and vicious dog!” I wanted to throw Doug into my bike and run for our lives, but the bear dog was there, and Doug wasn't hurt.

“Catch me!” Douglas shrieked, breaking away from Wong Wong. This little man, whom everyone thought was lifeless, ran with all his energy. Wong Wong jumped up and flew on top of him, they both fell and rolled on the floor.

“Gooood boy!” Douglas was patting his head and rubbing his

stomach up and down. His voice was loud and resounding. Then he took a surprisingly huge drumstick from a bag and stuffed it into Wong Wong's watery mouth. It savored and devoured it. He got up, took some other food out of that bag and gave it to the petite old lady, who was sitting in a rocking armchair, knitting.

I felt a lump in my throat, as if it was a huge cube of ice, starting to slide down into my belly. It melted, sending a steady flow of icy water up and down my veins. It struck me that Ducky got out of that black cloud, and for the first time in a long time, I saw into Ducky's eyes through those broken windowpanes. There he was, his face was shining with genuine happiness, his eyes brightly sparkling.

Douglas did grow up, though not as big physically and as brilliant intellectually as we would have liked. But he did grow up, spiritually and morally.

To My Heavenly Grandfather

To Christians
he who does not believe in Jesus Christ
when alive
cannot go to heaven after death.

So
Should I suppose
You're suffering in hell as a ghost?

How desperately I want to talk to you
But there is no phone
Which can connect the bound me
And the underground you.
So I write a poem,
And fold it into a white flower
On which I write "To my Heavenly Grandfather".
Then I'll burn it.
Flame becomes the postman
Who brings us together for a moment.

Kitty CHUNG Kit-yee

Bday 24

Ting Hoi Ying Heidi

“21 grams
They say we all lose 21 grams
At the exact moment of our death
Everyone.
The weight of a stack of nickels
The weight of a chocolate bar.
The weight of a hummingbird.”

21grams. If death weighs 21 grams.
What about my Birthday, my 24th bday ?
How much can it weigh ?
The weight of lies of dishonesty in all these years
Of responsibility
Of facing your life yourself, without the backing of your family.
No number can describe the heaviness. Nor can we weigh death.
All is but a number game.
[About weights, concealment, growing pains, cover and lies]

Amid the hustle bustle of Saturday Mong Kok, I was on my way through the faceless crowd to the turnstile of the Mong Kok KCR station when someone in blue polo shirt cut into my destined route. I halted my speed.

“Miss, would you mind helping the Universal Children Fund by buying this 10 dollar coupon ? Just 10 dollars and you can.....”

“Oh I have just bought one from your colleague in the plaza.’ I said, pointing to the direction from where I was just from, and taking

advantage of her loosen state, quickly dashed through the turnstile.

Another lie. So how many lies so far have I lied in my life? Lying itself is already a sin, and lying to good-hearted people adds a lead chain to the original guilt. But I have my reason. I was broke this month, I still have \$2543.2 yet to be paid to bank for my credit card and I have already sponsored an Indian kid through the Oxfam programme. Each month I have \$1200 spent on my painting class and afterall, I am only a student, a full-time undergrad CUHK, bound by study with zero earning power.

Emerging from the newly-renovated Ma On Shan KCR station, I was drenched in the golden dusk light shone through the curved window pane of the tunnel-like flyover connecting the station and the plaza. Beautiful, I thought, but at its last hour. I know I was late for the “appointment”. In my brisk gait, I took a quick look at my watch. 18:25, my Baby-G blinks. Damn. My time-conscious businessman uncles would have something to blame me again. Then my cell phone rang.

“Yes ?”

“Honey, it’s Mom. Where are you now? We are all waiting for you at the restaurant. All the people are here now ... Por Por, Big uncle, Big auntie, second uncle. You know even Man-hon is here. He’s got a test tomorrow but he still ...”

“Mom, I’m in Ma On Shan already, just got out of the train and will reach the restaurant in 5 minutes. Please say sorry to them for me.”

“You just came out from Kwun Tong ?”

“Yes... and originally I could have arrived at the restaurant now,

but when I was at Mong Kok KCR station, some volunteer just stopped me to make me hear their stupid charity plan and not letting me go and I just have to stop and pay for the coupon...”

“Ok then. Don’t you stroll around the mall and come straight away. We are all waiting for you to make the order”

“OK –”

I cut the line before the background mumbles become too intruding. So the bigger the family you have, the more responsibility your action holds. Originally you could just have apologized to 3 or 4 people. Now you have a dozen to radiate your sorry gaze to. But it was Mom’s way, to make a big fuss out of everything, even my birthday, something which I do not want to be reminded of. Even a birthday SMS seemed redundant and insignificant, like unimportant persons and events that got sieved away like useless seed coats under my mind’s default deletion system.

The state of being 24 is just as embarrassing as the state of being a teenager – the stuck-in-between ambiguity, the discomfort of nearly ‘being there’ and not quite.

Though you still have 365 days before reaching the mid-point of your 20s, claiming yourself to be still in your early 20s seems not to be doing reality justice. But this is not the main issue. The core of all the heart’s hardness and weight lies in the fact that I am beginning to question myself how much I have achieved so far until this point of my life, since my birth 24 years ago. Stories of family members flash through my mind last night on my birthday eve and still swirl in my head. Mom got married to Dad at 25. My biggest uncle gets married at 22 and had his firm at 25. My cousin in the States, who just has her

26th birthday last month, will have her PHD gowns on this coming summer. What about me ? Most of my high school classmates are in their final year of a second degree, whereas I am still struggling through my first degree while still having yet another thing to pursue. All these thoughts mingled with the kaleidoscope of moving color patches the dining hall of the restaurant presents to me in front. Entrapped by the steam columns rising from dishes and steamboats, my vision and hearing is muffled by all the clink-clangs and chattering and laugh, big loud laugh. Greedy existence everywhere stuffing their stomachs with the remains of once living organism; dying toxic screams accompanied the chopping of the ivory cubic gate. In this light that is too light and celebrating happiness that is too loudly ironic, I begin to turn and run.

“Weeei, Hoi-Ying, here. Ai here! Turn to your left! ” My mom yelled. And there, there, at my 8 o’clock position, a full table of people and food; animal, meat contained in round dishes, glittering with oil, waiting for me.

“Hoho. So our B-day girl finally appears, out of her den. For how long has she been late? 5...10...20 mintues! 20 minutes of 11 people meaning 220 minutes all together! Shall you apologize to each one of us?” my big uncle bellowed from his seat.

As if I would very much want to be late, Uncle.

Sheepishly I smiled at him, as a soft way to counteract the criticism while taking my seat stuffed between my mother and sister.

“Half a year, it’s been half a year since I have seen you! Never came back home for dinner, and never come for tomb visit with us! Are you really THAT busy??” He sarcastically continued while turning the lazy-susan, picking a piece of steamed chicken up from the dish in front, dipped into the sauce and put into his mouth.

“Drink some tea, drink some tea.” Only my small auntie is caring enough to notice I just arrived on the scene.

“Thanks, Auntie Polly.” I said to her.

Such kind of family has always been a panic to me. Shared blood but with mismatch ideals, values and worldviews. As a minority in the maternal side of my family, it’s been tremendous pressure sitting on the same table among them – iconic representatives of capitalism, materialism, commercialism, hierarchical management, you name it. On the table, only the big men do the talking; the ladies and children listen and eat. My three uncles, and the rest of us, enveloped among these 3 strong columns. So when I found their attention quickly switched back to their previous conversation on economics and politics of Hong Kong, big concern for the dear merchants who feed as well as feed on the Hong Kong public, I am happy enough to retreat into my own space, quietly nimble on the food left in my bowl, lukewarm and greasy, unappealing to the appetite while they went on discussing the Hong Kong democracy, the LEGCO and Leung Kwok Hung, nicknamed Long Hair, a different species I would say, from the usual general LEGCO members.

“Definitely he is certainly wasting his effort. He is not ‘operating’ according to the flow. How can you have a stable economy when there is no order in the society? It’s really not the time for a complete democracy here. Someone has got to take charge on the top,” one said.

The other continued, “Yeah. I mean, I don’t see Hong Kong people are mature enough to elect for themselves their own chief executive.”

“And don’t you have any idea how strange he is? It’s a surprise to me how he got absorbed into the Legco. He doesn’t trim himself! Always walk around with his messy long hair, like a gorilla doing

stupid crazy act – tearing newspaper, mocking the government. I mean, come on! When will he come to his senses? He does not have a ground of his own, object for the sake of objecting the government.” I yawned, while my cousin turned on his game boy and my sister flipping through her fashion magazine. Bored with politics, I begin to ‘compose’ a mini stage model, approximately 1: 200 in scale, using the bowls, toothpicks and chopsticks in front.

The minimal graphic language, that could be a stage for a modern play or a operatic concert like that by George Tsy-pin, I thought.

“Yes, immature, like the university students today, never has a thought about the purpose of the policy behind and the collective benefits. Certainly you cannot satisfy everyone’s wishes”

University students? Did I catch something like that? A voice ringing Hot! Hot! in my ears. I smell danger.

“Oh so Hoi-ying, how old are you this year?” my big uncle asks.

Figures!

“24, Uncle,” I responded dryly.

“When will you graduate? Next year? This year? And you are doing architecture in HKU right?”

“No-no-no... English, I will be graduating this year, after May.” I explained further.

“After May? That’s quick. Hey Hey, attention everyone. Our birthday girl is going to graduate after 6 months. One big mile stone in life after all. Haha. Hooi-Ying, why don’t you share your career plan with us all ? Any thoughts about what to do afterwards?”

“Er...ehh... Not really, probably something related to culture. –” I said. I hate to be put under the spot light, hate to be asked when all that I answer is not what you want to hear, and devalue its value.

“Culture eh? Hmmm. What possibly can you do in the field of

‘culture’?”

“Why don’t you go be a civil servant in the government, like Chan Fong On Sang ? She finished her degree in Hong Kong U, got a job in the government and everyone just see how she flew and soared in her career ladder. She couldn’t have made a better role model for you to take after. Being a civil servant is stable job.”

“Yeah or a lawyer. Get a 9-5 job, and do a distance part-time degree in law. Or come to study in Beijing. Tsing Hwa, the best university in China, so many students all around the country just dying to get in. China is expanding its market with a great influx of foreign capital. Legal advisors are on high demand. If you choose this path you are bound to have a comfortable living and buy a big house for your mother!! Hahahah ...”

“Nah, I think Hoi Ying should be a police officer” – What the? Uncle Wai, are you kidding me? With my height of 5’3” and a physique that is as weak as ... ? “A police officer is good. It will train your discipline. Tell you something, Hoi-Ying, 30 years ago, your uncle, that’s me, was in the army. There was this camp where we all the soldiers had to live in, and we were only allowed to release back home once a week. They were tough days. And you see how strong and healthy I am now?”

“Bro – cut it. Hoi Ying wouldn’t want to be a policewoman. Law will suit her more, right, Hoi-Ying? She does English in University. This will equip her with studies in the legal field. And there is no such thing as late starter in it. Like Yong Ching Ching, she starts studying law at ...”

“Yeah, it’s either Law or Civil Service. Police Officers is too much ...”

“She might be weak in physique, but she has the strategic brain

and wit – ...”

“What about editor in magazine? Magazine is cultural enough...”

So blah blah blah. Blah blah blah they went on with their speculation on my future, just like the way they do it with stock, except they have not noticed the information that they grasp hold of for this speculation has been 3 years in age – good in language, studious and serious in attitude. They did not sense the under-current of change and my mother does not say a thing. The beer girl came to refill the uncle’s empty glass. She struggled a bit with the bottle opener on the mouth before popping it open and poured the golden liquid into Uncle Wai’s glass with care while lavishing an embarrassing smile. Nice, I said to myself. For the whole night, I was merely an instrument, a tool, an excuse for providing a chance for a gathering, and topics for some ‘talk’. I shut up, only my hand moves around on the little structure in front, adding more pieces of broken toothpicks and torn tissue paper and adjusting the position of the chopsticks to better the composition, while they continue their jibe under the companion of beer and the last course of fried rice and stewed I-noodels.

When they finally finished, Uncle Chor, having noticed the ‘heap of utensils’ in front of me, said, “Dear dear Heidi, what is this?! You are no longer little girl. Turning 24 today and still playing with dinnerware like a kid!” The whole family roared with laughter.

I smiled sheepishly to dodge.

Dazed, I turn to my right, away from the KCR station to get to the bus-stop. 89X, a good choice of transportation that take you straight back home from Shatin to Kwun Tong, with a guaranteed abundance of unoccupied seats, and economy – only \$ 6.4 compared to \$9.5

charged by the KCR-MTR combo. Thoughts flux with the speed of the vessel through the darkness of the city. Lawyer – OA – Police Officer – Legal Advisor – management trainees, the phantom does not die with the feast drawing to a close, but growing fiercer and fiercer on the smoothness of the highway – Big house – Luxury – Fame – Status – Money – Travel – Success. Whheeeeeeee.....HA! HA ! HA !- HA ! HA! HA!

I got off the bus, cross the road, press the combination – click – haul the gate open, get into the lobby. Press the button, get into the lift, press the button again. Lift came to 3/F. I stepped out and walk to my apartment. I rummage for my key in my bag. I can't find it. I rummage again. There it is. Hi, it said to me. Thanks buddy, I smiled and said to him. I unlocked the door, push it open. Then I press on the light switch to complete my get-home ritual.

No light.

I press the switch on again, again and again

Still the tungsten doesn't breathe.

Damn, I cursed.

Then I remember the warning letter from CLP I have received 2 weeks ago.

My luck just cannot be worse. No light on birthday.

I dozed off to sleep drenched in sweat, in the heat of 24 red candle sticks.

I dreamed. In my dream, I heard the voice of Amy, my best buddy who went to England.

She said to me. "You know what Heidi, when you get confused, go off to a vast place and look up at the stars above. Then you will know what you want to do." I searched around. No sky, it's the low ceiling of the Chinese building that I am living in. But I see 24 little light moths

flickering on my left hand side. In them, I see the faces of Ming Cholee, Kelvin Tsang, Peter Brook, Bolt Brecht, George Tsypin, Erich Wonder, Ralph Koltai, Maria Bjornson, Leo Yuen, Gabriel Fung ..., all winking at me.



'Silence'

a painting of LAU Hok Gee
Department of Fine Arts, CUHK, 2006

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Department of English

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tel: (852) 2609-7005/7 fax: (852) 2603-5270

email: English@cuhk.edu.hk

webpage: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/eng/>

English@CUHK

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