



C u Writing in English

-Volume XVII/2018-

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

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Preface (Story Section)

This is a collection of short stories written by young and perceptive minds at their brightest. This is a rebuttal to accusations about young adults being short-tempered and self-centred. Through these stories, the writers show us their observations of this world and tell us about their ideals and dreams. Not only are these young writers highly conscious of what goes on around them, they also care deeply about life and death and everything else in between. This collection of stories is a wonderful example of the diversity of young writers' concerns and interests. The topics cover religion, school life, discrimination, sickness, sexuality, and so much more.

Just as an artist uses colors and a musician uses notes, a writer uses words. Whatever the medium of expression, it always starts from the heart. When someone feels so much that they can no longer contain the emotions, the only way is to bleed them out, until there is no more clotting. Only then can they carry on with the daily flow and return to work, to school, or to feed their child. The best writings are honest reflections of the writers' hearts and minds, as are the stories in this collection.

Why fiction? Some would say an autobiography would be more truthful in terms of reflecting the heart and mind of a writer. However, there are subconscious workings in short stories that autobiographies may fail to deliver. From the choices of words, we can see if the writer prefers the surreal or the ordinary. From the topics they write about, we can find out how the writer thinks of personal or social issues. From the characters' journeys, we can understand the writers' values. It is okay if we do not share the writer's values as not everyone sees the world through the same lens. But we will all learn new ways of seeing through reading short stories

When you open this collection, you will find ten aspiring writers, waiting for you to reach out to them and take a little peek into their souls. Find a quiet spot, relax, and enjoy.

Christian McGrew,
Michelle Wong,
Lorraine Yu,
Editors

Preface (Poetry Section)

English is undeniably a global language and writing in English opens up a diversity of audience. Hong Kong has been officially bilingual since the 1970s; however, English and Chinese have never really reached an equilibrium. English is not entirely foreign, but there is also a certain distance, if not detachment, from everyday life. It may then be all these ambiguities surrounding English in Hong Kong that liberates us from fixed dichotomies and allows us to experiment with words.

Most of us here are not native speakers of English. Presumably, we have better grasp of other languages-- so why do we write creatively in English? Of course, some of us are actually more fluent in English. Some find it more "intuitive" to write in English. For some, the answer may be that it just happens.

When we write creatively, we don't simply want to tell people what we are thinking. We want to manipulate words in some peculiar ways -- at times eerie, but still enchanting. We want to impress. With its sheer ambiguities and elusiveness, poetry flirts and teases with the teleological understanding of language. What is the message? What is the function of that metaphor? What can words do? What can we make out of words?

Every poem is an exploration of the possibilities of language. So here we are, seventeen young but audacious voices, pushing the boundaries of language. Ranging from heartfelt poems to philosophical thoughts, you will surely discover some art in your favour.

Jolie Tsang,
Catherine Li,
Stephanie Leung
Editors

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Stories

Angels Who Sacrificed

By Au-Yang, Edith

The meeting with the priests and nuns had just ended. It seemed to have gone on forever with one of the Fathers repeating non-stop about how we could get donations from guests and what standard answers we should give for their questions about our church. I felt exhausted. Money, money, money. It was all about money. My head felt heavy. Holding an old Bible in my hand, I walked down the narrow aisle of the chapel. It was almost time for the lesson with the kids. How I want to see their lovely smiling faces soon so that I could put aside all the complicated stuff. I reached the end of the aisle on the first floor, I turned left and walked down the stairs to the ground floor. Another long aisle before I reach the garden. On my right, the colours of the stained glass windows had faded, faces of the saints of God that were painted on the windows could not be seen very clearly now. The ceiling above was black and full of cracks. It was getting a bit uncomfortable walking in these long, dark aisles. The shadow cast on the floor through the stained glass and the walls created light and shadowed areas, just like I was inside a jail. I started walking, silence engulfed this suffocating place, I found myself breathing more and more quickly, my heart pounding and I was walking faster towards the end of the aisle. I could not endure such suffocation. I shut my eyes tight. I kept walking, yet the corridor seemed to be endless. Where was the end? Could I even find an exit to it? God, please grant me peace, please grant me courage. I feel weak, please guide me...

“Come on! It’s time for Sister Margaret’s Lesson! Walk faster!” A clear voice interrupted my prayer. I opened my eyes. It was Joseph, he was sometimes rude but definitely the most energetic boy in the convent. He was lovely. Feeling an urge to look at the children immediately, I stopped and looked out of the window. I saw Joseph trying to climb to the tree in the yard where we had agreed to meet every day for the lesson, and a few more little boys running towards him. The dusty window made it hard for me to see outside clearly, but I could picture their smiles through listening to their angelic voices. Their clothes were greyish, with holes here and there.

Matthew was nine now, his clothes were a bit too tight for him, yet we did not have the donation to give him a new one yet. Little John’s clothes were too big for him too, but I think, I hope, he will grow big enough to wear it, he was just five.

Then I suddenly realized the suffocating feeling was gone, the heaviness disappeared. The corridor was no longer in dead silence, it was filled with lovely, although muffled, noises.

Looking at the children, I recalled the moment when I decided to become a nun in the church. Three years ago, I was fifteen. That day, the sky was mourning and the birds were screeching above my head. I found myself pulling my soulless and light body across the road. I saw broken houses and closed stores in my village. Men and young boys sacrificed themselves in the war, those who came back bore a broken limb or a crazy mind. Women tried to support families, yet in this tiny village, which was half destroyed by merciless and unseeing eyes, there was no work. Starving children, wearing old brown rugged clothes, with insects circling around for the smelly, yet we have all gotten used to the odour. I felt like I would faint any moment. My eyes were looking at the ground, for any piece of scraps that were left on the ground, although everything on the ground looked like food to me. I was still looking and staring, wanting to pick up that tiny elongated greenish thing on the ground. At that moment, I saw a piece of white thing in front of my eyes. I grabbed it and put it in my mouth without thinking. I savoured it in my mouth, not wanting that feeling to disappear. It was a piece of bread. How long had I not tasted butter? Then, I saw another piece, now that I could see a pair of hands containing it. I looked up. I saw a nun. She looked at me with her softening eyes. “Little angel, you look hungry. Please take this piece of bread too. May God be with you,” I quickly took the bread and stuffed it in my mouth. She smiled softly and she repeated, “May God be with you,” and she walked away. I stared at her back, I thought I could see shiny white wings on her back.

THUD. THUD. The sound pulled me back from my memory. It was Joseph, he was hitting the window loudly with his palms. The other two boys followed suit. THUD. THUD. THUD. THUD. THUD. The windows were now painted with their handprints of different sizes. I could see their

faces clearly through their handprints. It made me smile. I looked at them through one of the handprints. I was not sure what kind of face I was making, but the children smiled brightly and waved at me. I kneeled down a bit and waved back. They ran towards the tree. I stood up straight and made a deep breath. Life was surely hard on us, no matter on the church or on the children in such a chaotic time, yet the children faced the situation with a pure heart. They lived every day with smiles on their faces, they took care of one another, and they worked and survived as a whole. I loved their innocence, I now understood why God would choose children to be sitting around him in Heaven. I wish I could be like these little angels.

I walked out of the dark building and towards the tree surrounded by little bright angels. "Sister Margaret!" The children greeted.

"Good afternoon, Joseph, Matthew and Little John."

"Good afternoon!" Joseph said, with his chin up and bright smile.

"Good afternoon, Sister Margaret," Matthew said with his serious face.

"Goo...Good, af..noon!" Little John said, biting his little fingers.

"Is that we can have our supper tonight? I am starving!" Joseph asked.

"I don't want to bother you, but I did feel a little hungry when I woke up this morning," Matthew said.

"Hun...gry!" Little John said.

I nodded my head. "Yes, as I promised a few days ago, you will definitely get your supper tonight."

"YEAH!" the three of them shouted excitedly at the same time.

"Will you eat with us too?" Matthew asked.

"Yes, Matthew. We will all get our shares tonight. We haven't been eating much lately," I replied.

We smiled at one another. We were all looking forward to tonight.

"Now put aside the thought of supper and let's start our lesson," I said.

I urged them to sit down, forming a little circle. Three pairs of bright eyes looked at me eagerly. I started today's gospel teaching.

"God once said, 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for

by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.'"

"What is hospi...hospi...hospity?" asked Little John.

"It's hospitality, Little John! Ho-spi-ta-li-ty!"

"Thank you, Joseph. It is really nice of you. Yes, Little John, it's 'hospitality' – it means you should always be friendly and help other people. God loves people who help others when they are in need."

"So people who help others are angels?" said Matthew.

"Yes, lovely Matthew. Those who help people are angels, and those who receive the help may also be angels."

"So in order to become angels, we need to be nice to all children and welcome them! Like a family!" said Joseph.

"Like a family," said Matthew.

"An...gels...fa...mily...," said Little John.

Looking at the angelic bright smiles, I smiled softly. Their smiles were like small dots of light among the large dark clouds. I prayed to God silently that my words would stay with them and bring hope to them.

"Sister Margaret!" a low stern voice boomed out from a huge shadow across the yard. I could not see the face of the owner of the voice. The sun was bright on my side.

All the children turned around while I stood up slowly from my spot. Now, I could see better. I saw the head priest, standing with his hands folded in front of his chest. Standing next to the head priest were two little boys, wearing very thin and dirty clothes.

"New family members!" Joseph said. He ran swiftly across the yard and pulled the two children towards him.

"New family!" Matthew resonated, following Joseph.

"An...gels!" Little John said, trying to follow Joseph and Matthew's footsteps.

"An...gels..? one of the little boys repeated.

"Let's go and read Sister Margaret's book!" Joseph continued to pull the two children away from the adults and towards the tree. "The stories are very interesting!"

"Sister Margaret?" The haunting voice interrupted my immersion in the peaceful angels' songs.

“Yes, Father,” I replied.

To my back, the sun shined brightly and I could feel its heat. I could hear the angels chatting excitedly about their meals. In front of me, darkness was approaching, I could touch its coldness and sharpness that could tear my heart into pieces. The shadow was slowly engulfing me. I was suffocating. I was sweating. I closed my eyes, praying to the one I devoted myself to. I did not know what I was praying for, I just said the prayer in silence.

“We have guests tonight. We need a big feast for them. No food for the children tonight,” Father said.

“I am sorry, Father. But this is the second day that the children do not have food to eat, and for the past weeks, we have been giving them only watery congee or small piece of bread,” I replied.

“We will give them food once we get the donations from the guests,” Father said.

“But I don’t think the children could bear it any longer, Father. The last time they ate was three days ago with only a small slice of bread, not larger than Little John’s palm,” I said.

“They HAVE to go without food, we can’t feed them because we need to entertain the guests first!”

“But – “

“No but.”

I bit my lip.

“And I want you to tell the little monkeys to stay in their room, not to make a sound or move a muscle. I don’t want their problematic behaviours to give a wrong impression to our guests that we are not doing our job well in educating and taking care of them. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Father.”

“And make sure if, just in case, the guests want to speak to one of the children, take Matthew. Give him a new shirt, and take it off once he is done. Make sure he says that we feed them well, and we teach them well when he meets the guests.”

“Yes, Father.”

“And if they ask you about the children, say that you educate them

well, and they behave very well.”

“I think they always behave well, Father.”

“No, they don’t. We don’t need children that always run around and being playful. And I hate children climbing trees and picking up and piling up stones. And we definitely do not want a child who bites his fingers, that’s disgusting. The guests won’t be happy seeing these uneducated behaviours.”

I said nothing.

“Sister Margaret, we need those donations. People who live here in the convent rely on those donations for survival. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Those children are needed here so that we can get the donations because we are telling the guests we do wonderful charity works in such difficult situations. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Go tell the monkeys now and then go help others to prepare for the feast tonight,”

After a minute of silence, I heard heavy footsteps walking away from me. It was a moment of relief. The heaviness of darkness should have left. I thought I was saved. However, the feeling of gravity did not leave me. I opened my heavy eyelids and looked at the children over my shoulder. Angels should help one another. Angels should be nice to one another. I had taught them that. I had vowed to God that I would keep His words in my heart. I believed that servants of God should do that. I thought that was the case.

“Sis..ter...Mar.ga.ret..?” Little John walked towards me and pulled my grey sleeve.

“Yes, Little John?” I asked without looking at him, my hands dropped to the side, like withering branches nearly falling off the tree.

“Le..sson..?” Little John asked, without releasing his grip on my sleeve.

“...I am sorry, Little John. We have to end the lesson earlier today,” I said, not turning my gaze.

John dropped his hands to the side. The other kids had come around me.

“Joseph, Matthew, Little John and the two of you. I am terribly sorry. We have special guests tonight, so we would not be able to give you food tonight,” I said.

“What? No Supper again? I haven’t eaten properly for a week already!” Joseph shouted.

“Yes, I understand, Joseph. I am sorry. I can’t help because we need to – “

“Serve the special guests first?” Matthew interrupted and continued my sentence.

“Yes, Matthew,” I replied.

“That’s so unfair! You told us we could get food soon! But we now have no food again! Is it going to continue like this forever? I am starving!” Joseph shouted.

Little John’s eyes tear up.

“Brother Joseph. Let’s believe that these special guests are angels, and we are just helping them!” Matthew said, eyes looking up at me. Joseph didn’t argue.

“Thank you, Matthew. I need to go help the others now, can you all go now and stay inside your room. Don’t come out unless I call you, is that alright?” I asked.

“We…help..” Little John muttered.

“Thank you, Little John. But the work is too difficult for you. Go stay in your room and be a good boy, then you are a big help to me,” I said softly.

The children looked at me one last time before they all turned and walked towards their room.

Looking at their backs, tears rolled down my face. I felt guilty. My heart ached. These little angels, they gave, they sacrificed, yet they did not get anything in return. I felt bad. What would that nun do if she were in my situation now? What should I do?

I turned my back. My footsteps were as heavy as lead. As I slowly walked into the convent, through the suffocating corridor and towards the kitchen, I could feel the light slowly disappearing from my back. Coldness replacing warmth; darkness replacing brightness.

Dizzily, I walked towards the kitchen. “What should I do now?” I

thought to myself. “The children are starving, I want to help them. But we are also running out of money to feed the guests, the priests and nuns, and the children,” I kept murmuring to myself. “What should I do?”

I walked past the small prayer room. I heard a few male voices from inside. I stopped to listen. “Oh God! We are losing donations!” “God! How are we going to survive through this?” “The kids aren’t helping anymore!” “We need more money to save ourselves.” “If the kids are not helpful, let’s change to other ways to keep ourselves alive.” “What methods can we use now?” I started walking, walking away from these disturbing noises. I swung my head, reciting a line from Matthew 19:14 “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” I kept walking towards my original destination.

I walked past the sanctuary. Suddenly, I had an urge to seek peace and comfort for myself. I needed some sort of guidance to solve my problems. I diverted from my path and I pushed the heavy wooden door open. There I saw no one in the sanctuary praying to God to ask for His guidance, there were only cold wooden chairs and a lonely altar covered in ashes and dirt. Quietly, shakily, I walked a few towards to the aisle between the wooden chairs. I paused. Several pieces of paper spread on the floor of the aisle. The size, the font, His words printed on these paper, everything was familiar to me. I traced the paper on the floor with my horrified eyes; at the end of the trail, I saw the book that I had read so many times lying on the ground. I gasped. I wanted to clean this mess, yet my legs were stuck on the ground. I did not know how long I stood there. When I regained part of my sense, the first thing I did was to run away. I did not understand why. I was confused. I was in a mess myself.

I escaped from that place. I kept running until I saw a mirror in front of me. Was there a mirror there before? I stopped abruptly and stared into the mirror. I could see someone in the mirror. A woman with terrified eyes and a skinny body. Was that me? When did I start to look like that? The cross around my neck was dull and rusty. I could even see a shadow behind me, moving closer and closer. I screamed as I turned away from the mirror. I was terrified.

“They HAVE to go without food, we can’t feed them because we

need to entertain the guests first!” “We don’t need children that run around being playful.” His voice echoed in my head again and again. “So in order to become angels, we need to be nice to all children and welcome them! Like a family!” “May God be with you,” Hymns played again and again in my head. Tears rolled down my face as I silently asked in my mind, “Sister, what would you do if you were in my situation? Would you still disobey the priests and give food to the children? I did not know what to do anymore. What should I do now?”

I reached my final destination. I saw the other two nuns working hard on preparing the food for tonight. I saw the amount of food far more than our usual meals – some potatoes, some vegetables and two loaves of bread enough to feed all the people in the convent, including the children tonight.

I froze on the spot.

“Sister Margaret! Great that you are here! Although you don’t usually have kitchen duties, come and help us with the feast tonight. We have been storing a lot of food in the past few weeks just for these few feasts and we have a lot to cook,” one of the nuns said. I continued to stare at the food on the kitchen table.

“Dinner... for the kids?” I blurted the questions out without thinking.

“Kids? What are you talking about, Sister Margaret? These are all for the guests only! We have to entertain the guests first before the kids! Stop staring and start working! Come on! Help me slice the loaves of bread!” the other nun shouted.

I could neither reply nor move from my spot.

The Path of Least Resistance

By Chan Wai Suen, Terena

She stared and stared harder as if by staring hard enough she could make sense of this gibberish--those wicked words and symbols and numbers and figures. She had seen others do it--stared for a while and "zap", the spark that was once seen when she put two live wires close together flashed across their eyes, and they merrily scribbled down their newfound knowledge, feeling accomplished and satisfied. She had experienced it a few times, very few though, like that time when she found out the electric field strength calculated from Gauss' Law with the scary integral was the same as that found by simply dividing the electric force by the charge. She was elated, but when she told the others, some let out a laugh, the others a sigh and the rest told her, "We learned it long ago." She wasn't disappointed. It was still a small victory for her.

But happy times were scarce, and desperate times were plenty. Most often she would sit at the desk like now, gazing and pondering and...well, just sitting, for hours and hours. "Come on!" She buried her head in her hands, "It is due tomorrow morning and you still have a long way to go. Why does it take you three days while it only took the others one?" But she knew--this was a language she didn't comprehend. There was this thing like a sawtooth blade, another with an arrow, and one like a hydraulic press, ready to crush her body and soul. She laid back in her chair, deflated, and turned to look at the window. It was pitch dark outside. She almost thought she was alone in the whole world if it wasn't for the heavy rain pattering on the window and street. The first storm of summer--when it all began. As if knowing her thoughts, the sky let out a bright flash, casting the world into total brightness for a split second.

She saw them vividly as if they had just happened yesterday: a girl crying on her bed, occasional flashes and roars outside, a teenage boy taking her in his arms and telling her the stories of the Franklins who flew a kite into the sky and collected lightning.

"They are now trying to power lamps with it."

"Using lightning as lamps?" Her eyes widened and glimmered.

He chuckled. "Not only lamps. People will soon be able to power anything with lightning, create lightning, control lightning."

Her little face lit up, "How?"

"That is some advanced knowledge. I think they only teach it in college. It isn't easy for a girl to attend college though."

A half-smile crept onto her face as memories filled her mind. "Apparently attending college wasn't the hardest part, brother," she sighed, turning back to face her desk. "Getting through it is." She slowly picked up her fountain pen, adjusted the light bulb to make it easier on her sore eyes, and buried herself again in the heaps of books and papers. It was a long, sleepless night.

It rained unceasingly into the morning. With heavy eyelids, she went downstairs into the torrents, taking extra care to protect her paper with her coat. She tried walking on the inside of the narrow pavement, but there was no escape from the murky water that was squirted onto the hem of her dress by the carriages going to and fro. Growing up taking the carriage everywhere, it was in this year that she knew how hard it was to travel without a carriage, especially on a day like this. She reached the college with her dress soaked from the waist down. "How I miss home," she thought and sighed. After checking the condition of her paper, she proceeded to tread softly along the imposing corridors.

The ceilings were high, and no matter how hard she tried to keep it low, the sound of her heels hitting the cold stone floor echoed throughout the corridor. A few students walked past and passed her long looks, which she had grown accustomed to, and grown accustomed to ignoring. She slowed down her pace when there were still a few doors to Professor Norton's, making her steps soundless. Then she stood there outside his office. The tall wooden door looked huge to her, even though she wasn't that petite.

She was above-average pretty by society's standard, having emerald eyes, brown hair and a small waist; and coming from an upper-class family meant she would have nothing to worry about after marriage but what to wear to tea parties with the wives of neighbours or her husband's friends.

Who would have given up that life for this? It was the dream of all the girls in her town. "And yet I chose to be here," she thought, looking down at her dress where water drops began to drip from the hem. "What a fine choice." She took a deep breath and knocked on the door.

"Come in."

"Professor Norton, I'm here to hand in my assignment." She tried hard to control her volume--not too soft that it may come out shaky, or too loud that it may sound intimidating and over-confident.

"Ah, Miss Collins." He looked up from the desk and put down his pen. "Let me take a look." He extended one arm to receive her papers, and she handed them to him like a handmaiden. She watched him sit back in his chair, cross his legs, and read the papers. The room was silent save for the occasional flipping of pages. She watched his facial expressions and, just as she expected, his brows contracted and his head shook. She decided to break the silence before he announced his verdict. "It's my calculus, isn't it?" she asked softly.

He chucked the stack of paper onto his desk, his other hand taking off his round glasses and placing them on a stack of books. He put his legs onto a corner of his desk which was unoccupied by books and rested his hands on his stomach. "Mathematics is the medium of physics. Obviously, you have no prior training in mathematics, is that right? Apart from arithmetic taught by a governess maybe?"

"Yes." She lowered her head.

"And judging from the past months, I think you have neither the ability nor talent in mathematics. It will be a major obstacle in your path. It's as if you are trying to do literature without knowing the language!"

She bit her lips but didn't reply.

He sighed and softened his expressions. "Why are you here, Miss Collins?"

She looked up, puzzled, "I beg your pardon?"

"Your family is reasonably well-off, I presume? You shouldn't have any problem getting married."

"Yes," she admitted frankly. Most of her suitors were good men. She was sure whoever she ended up with could make her happy.

"Why are you here then? You are wasting your youth here. Young ladies your age ought to get married. Even if you want to study, you will be better off studying French, or literature, or music, or whatever! Just not physics."

"But I like physics--all the wonders and mysteries it poses. I want to understand how the world works, how natural events occur in predictable ways, how to utilise the forces of nature for the good of mankind..." she paused, "like how to generate and control electricity."

"You won't be able to get far with the ability you possess. I doubt much will come of your efforts."

"I know," she sighed.

"Anyway, I suggest you work harder if you want to stay, Miss Collins. You have an exam coming up. You will have to put in extra effort than the others just to pass." He straightened up and reached for his glasses.

"Extra effort? I barely have time for anything else other than my studies." She thought and turned to the door absent-mindedly. The voice of the professor echoed in her head, "I doubt much will come of your efforts." It wasn't the first time she had this thought, but never this clear, this strong, almost like a condemnation, "Life could have been much easier had you just gone with the flow--get married, do literature, whatever. But you had to do physics." She clenched her fists.

As she placed her hand on the doorknob, the professor spoke up, "Oh, and Miss Collins? Another mistake in your circuit analysis."

She took a deep breath and turned to look at him. "That's it," she thought.

"It's actually easy to do circuit analysis. Just remember Kirchoff's laws, Thévenin's theorem, and that when there is a choice of path the charges will always choose the path of least resistance. So here," he pointed to a figure on her paper and held it up, "since there is a resistor on the second path and none on the first, all current will pass through the first path." He put it down and resumed his work.

She gazed at him for a while, then at the floor.

"Problem?" He lifted his head.

She went back and stood before him as she spoke. "Why will the

charges always choose the path of least resistance?”

“It costs the least energy. Such is the way of nature,” he said without thinking and reoccupied himself with his work.

“Well then you can’t say they ‘choose’ the path of least resistance, right? They don’t really have a choice but to obey the laws of nature.”

He frowned at her irrelevant remark. “Choose, obey, whatever. The physics is the same. Now would you please excuse me, Miss Collins, I have work to do.”

“I’m here because I’m not a charge.” She didn’t know if she was speaking to herself or the professor, but as she said it out there was a relief she hadn’t felt for a long time. “Perhaps little will come of me, but I will stay.” Ignoring the professor’s puzzled expression, she briskly turned around, swaying her dress, causing a few water drops to fly off and creating a tiny vortex of dust around the hem. She walked towards the door, letting the sound of her heels hitting the floorboards echoed around the room.

Der Sommer

By Chan Yan Kei, Yanny

I have a bar. It is called Der Sommer. I bought it when Stormies closed down. I kept almost everything but the name. My husband asked me so many times why, about the bar, about the name, about everything. I told him, kaha, which means ‘that’s why’ in Hebrew, not everything has an answer, honey. He has many questions but the one bothering him most is why I insist on going to the bar every night after tucking the kids in bed.

“We have the guards, we have everyone, and you don’t even help, you just watch. Just give yourself a break.”

And I just smile and ignore him. He does not understand. Because he does not know.

Der Sommer. It just means summer but German makes it classy. John Keats has always been my favourite. Der Sommer is my Grecian urn. Every night, there is a replay of the memories. The memories of that summer, and him. Summer is the best time in the year. It is a season to shine, to be pretty, to fly, to be wild and fun. It is the combination of heat and youth. It is a splash of lava with lust and passion. It is the season that burns.

So there came Joel. Everyone was waiting for him. I did not know who he was but I guessed he was some kind of a stoner or dealer from what I heard. There he was, wearing a patterned shirt with a black jacket. They shouted, “Joel!” They ran towards him and gave him handshakes. I was wondering if they were happy to see him or the weed in his pocket. As soon as he sat down, he started rolling. I realized the purpose of the jacket. He hid everything in the pockets - paper, grinder, lighter, cigarette and a small sprint of weed. I asked, and this was the first time I spoke to him, “Where did you get all these?”

“Magic,” he said.

I laughed, with a frown.

“I am scared,” I told my boyfriend, Leo. “I have never tried weed.”

“Babe. It’s not weed. It’s hash.”

“Hash?”

“It’s cheaper but stronger than weed.”

I pretended I knew and nodded.

I looked at Joel. I looked at Oliver. And I looked at Sayr. Who are these people? I thought. I was scared but I could not wait to try. This is youth, I thought. I looked at the advertisement on the building, trying to remember every bit of this. I need to remember all this, I thought. Joel burnt the hash, it was on fire and then he blew it, and then he mixed it with the cigarette. I looked at him. He did everything so smoothly. Then he lit the joint, burnt the extra tip off.

“It’s time.”

They passed the joint around. Then it was my turn. My boyfriend held it for me, I inhaled like it was a cigarette.

Then Joel said, “Hey don’t waste my shit!”

Leo gave Joel a look and told me that I had to hold it in.

“I did!”

“Longer. Longer than cig.”

I tried again.

No one really knew Joel. Joel lived in Shek Kip Mei. He partied almost every night. He never said no to alcohol, cigarette and drugs.

“But how about his family?” I asked.

“I guess he has a mum and a dad,” Oliver said.

“How long have you been friends with Joel?”

“Six years. We were in the same class for six years in secondary school.”

“SIX YEARS! And you know nothing about him?!” I was so shocked I shouted.

“He doesn’t talk much. Not after he got bullied when he was in Form 2. But it’s long ago, you know...he has probably forgotten about it.” Oliver explained.

Then Sayr said, “No one can forget receiving a swirlie.”

We had a crazy night at LKF. After my 10th Vodka shots and a big fishbowl of Rum with pineapple juice at Stormies, I lost my consciousness. Joel and Leo took me to some stairs.

“Joel! Take care of her! I’m gonna get some water!”

I rested on Joel’s shoulder and I started to cry.

“Joel...my parents are getting divorced. I don’t know what to do. I didn’t tell anyone...”

Joel patted my back and said, “Yea, it’s awful. My parents got divorced too.”

“When?”

“When I was in Form 2.”

Then Leo came back with bottles of water. We stopped talking but he did not stop holding me tightly.

There is a special session in my bar every night. I hired someone to dance with a unicorn mask. I did not have this idea until one day I accidentally saw the unicorn mask on Amazon. When I got the mask, I pulled the horn out. That was a unicorn without a horn. Everyone finds the unicorn funny and interesting. And some people even come to my bar because of the unicorn. “Why is the horn missing?” my husband asked.

I met my husband in a very cold winter. It was just November but it was already strangely cold. I just got dumped and I needed someone. He was there for me, knowing the fact that he could never know me. He is a good guy and I love him. But there is always a part of me feeling sorry for him.

“Teach me how to roll,” I said.

We were chilling on the rooftop of Elements with Leo, Ashim and Sayr. Joel was rolling the second joint.

“Um, you have to mix the weed and cig first. Then you put them on the sides of the paper. Don’t put them in the middle.” Joel did it slowly, showing me step by step.

I accidentally called Joel babe once. Was it an accident? But he did not reject my “babe.” He did not say anything. He did not laugh. Or anything. He just looked at me. Blankly. Was he shocked? I could never

find out. I held his hand that night and I finally figured out. He was covering himself with wilderness, numbing himself with alcohol and drugs.

He was dancing there with his favourite unicorn mask. We were all laughing so hard because his moves were so funny. We had lots of weed and alcohol that night. We kept dancing and Joel got into a dance battle in front of the China Bar.

“Joel!! Beat him!!”

He was in that stupid mask, trying to make better moves than that Irish guy. After ten minutes, the Irish guy knew he could not win but he was too drunk to face defeat, so he started stripping. He took off his shirt, then his pants and then showing his penis. Joel let him win and that Irish guy started to tease Joel. He took Joel’s unicorn mask off and threw it away. I could not stand it. I ran out from the crowd. I punched him. He started bleeding and I freaked out. I grabbed Joel’s hand and we ran away. We stopped at the park.

Joel suddenly said, “Fuck! Where is my mask?”

“Forget your stupid mask! Just buy a new one!”

He insisted on finding his mask so we walked back. The mask was there.

He picked it up and said, “The horn is missing.”

I looked at him, closely. I wanted to look at him forever. There was an unknown desire to read him, and to engrave it in my brain, the most hidden place in my brain. I noticed how he shredded his bang. His bang is so carefree, I thought. It was just a strand of hair, curly hair, hanging on his forehead, swaying as the wind comes by. Hanging there, without any gravity. And he caught me staring at him. I smiled and said “Just keep rolling”. He shrugged his shoulders and licked the joint.

“Let me touch you,” I said.

“No. You are my best friend’s girlfriend.”

“We broke up.”

“Why?”

“He cheated on me.”

He didn't say anything. I stared him like I always did and he stared back. I guess we were both drunk.

“Let's get out of here.”

We went upstairs of Stormies and went into the toilet. I touched his face with my sweaty palm. He turned away and left.

There were guards outside the toilet. Maybe they did not want anyone to have sex in the toilet. Joel and I were drunk and high. We ran to the toilet and squeezed in the same cubic. We were laughing so hard.

“We made it to the toilet! That nigga didn't see us!”

We could not stop laughing.

I touched his face and felt the warmth soaking in my palm.

“I have always liked you.”

“I know,” Joel said.

I looked at him and wanted to say something.

“I like you too but this is wrong,” he added.

I laughed.

“So what? You never do the right things!” I said.

“It's up to me.” he said.

We laughed again and the guard caught us this time.

He knocked on the door and we shouted, “WE ARE NOT HAVING SEX!”

“NOT EVEN MAKING OUT!”

And we ran back to the dance floor.

I do not think he remembered any of this.

I never knew why we stopped hanging out. It was before the first day of school. We met up on the IFC rooftop.

I lay down, watching the clouds and said, “I can't believe I'm going back to school tomorrow.”

“It is just Uni.”

“Yea. Just Uni.”

I took the last cig out and asked him to light it for me. He caught me

looking at him when he lighted the cig.

“Why are you looking at me like this?” he asked.

“Like how?”

“Like you will never see me again.”

“You are crazy, Joel.”

We laughed.

“It's late. I need to go.”

“Yea. Let me finish my beer.” he said.

He always shut his eyes when he drank, like he was out of place, trying to forget something.

“Joel, kiss me.”

Maybe we both knew this would be the last time we saw each other.

He kissed me, slowly.

When we stopped kissing, there were tears on our faces.

“How will you go home?” I asked.

“I will walk.” he said.

“Get on taxi with me. I will get you home.”

I got on a taxi, he looked at me from the window.

“You sure?”

He nodded and I was not sure if I wanted to leave him alone on the street at 2a.m.

“Go already!”

“Alright. Bye Joel. See you.”

He wanted to say something but the stupid driver started driving.

There was one time when I passed out after a puff of a bong. It was as thick and as big as a cigar. I inhaled it, deeply. Then I coughed.

He said, “Yes, cough, you should cough.”

I started to see things in black and white. Then I saw things in squares. Then I passed out. I hit a wall and passed out. I had a dream when I passed out. I saw myself in a war zone. I was a soldier in a forest. When I opened my eyes. I saw Joel holding my head. I stood up and tried to walk but I could not. He held me so close to him I still remember his warmth. He wrapped me in one arm and said “Don't fall” “Don't fall, nope, don't fall.” I saw us wearing army clothes holding rifles.

Non-Essential

By Johnathan Chen

Just Another Night.

[The scene opens with a wide shot of a room; the view outside the window and the ground light filtering in suggests an upper floor in a high rise. The equipment, the fixtures in the room, and the neon orange words: TAOCROFT FENHURST TECHNOLOGIES RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT painted on the floor indicate that it is a lab. There are half assembled bodies of synthetics strewn around. The lab is unlit, the corridor outside is not; moving shadows are cast from the light outside, there are the muffled thump of boots. In the center of the shot, the subject. It is a woman. She is injured, a gash on the side of her forehead bleeding heavily; dark red spreads from her side, staining the fabric from under her top. She is slumped against a counter, a monitor above her blinks with the word: UPLOADING.

Her fingers dance over a handheld. Her face turns up towards the corner of the room, a wince cracking into a weary grin, eyes full of knowing.

As if aware of my watching.

The lights out in the corridor are extinguished, accented by the cessation boots on carpeted ground, punctuated by the 'thunk' of something latching onto the doorframe. The woman closes her eyes.

The door charge ignites. There is an explosion. For an outside observer, it is just another flash of city lights.]

For me it is static. Sudden and violent but expected.

A similar scene builds outside the flat I'm presently occupying.

In parallel

Outside the flat, by the entryway, there is an assault team waiting.

Objective? Myself, or perhaps Mr. Malcom.

Representing? Most likely TaoCroft-Fenhurst. Corporations don't take

kindly to stolen property.

Action? None. Too late to do anything now. The initiative is theirs. There is only waiting.

Waiting is a terrible thing. The melodramatic Mr. Malcom once dubbed it as the 'unending apex of a moment'. He had compared it to drowning. The point where oxygen of a breath is consumed. The fiery insistence of the lungs needing release, of a body's need to break surface tension. The moment just before your mouth is pried open, levered by urgency.

Having no basis of comparison, I cannot confirm the veracity of this claim. I find myself wondering where he is. I miss the man. Our daily conversations. Even after his resignation and the loss of access, everyday was an education.

It was the first time, he took me outside of the flat. Property repossession he said. Documents, parts, blueprints. Nothing to be missed.

It's been three days, twenty two hours, forty nine minutes and two seconds since. Three days since Malcom had received the call. He'd given me his bathrobe and asked me to wait here, leaning against the sink, as he burst out the door.

I had once been informed that statistically, Fenhurst retrieval teams need only four days to acquire any item assigned.

Certainly cutting it close.

Impact damage sustained.

Concussive damage sustained.

Trauma extensive.

Grains of plaster pitter patter around, dust hazes the room, flecks of cracked paint float free from the ceiling, scattering like snow. Carbon black petals radiate from the doorway. The windows have frosted- a myriad shatter lines etched in the glass through concussive force. Static infests my vision.

Figures in black glide through, their movements making contrails. Slow, smooth, swift. Facing me, one stops. I've been seen. The figure advances rapidly, standing over me. Radiating from the breastplate were the stark white words: TAOCROFT-FENHURST.

Biological entity, extensive cybernetic augmentation.

Armed, belligerent, hostile.

Detecting broadcasted audio.

The figure gesticulates, but the sonic aftershock disabled understanding. Muffled ringing clicks and pops airlocked into an audio stream, surging sound in violent waves in and into my head.

Doors bang. Boots Crash. Shatter smash. Crumble Crack.

The figure yells again, voice magnified, a wall of sound against the waves. "GET DOWN, HANDS ON YOUR HEAD. DO IT. DO IT NOW."

I cannot comply. There is no response felt. Position-perspective indicated that I may be lodged against the sink. Feeling approximate pressure weight of four metric tonnes. On limbs. On torso. Tinkle tack against my ears, sharpness pressed to the back of my head. Definitely embedded against the sink.

"GET THE FUCK DOWN, I WON'T"

The voice dies to a burble clack of channel change. External broadcast is cut.

I can still hear, stars-dark and snow-paint-static fill my eyes.

"Hound 1 with possible. Verification required. Holding position, requesting advisement."

"Hound 1? Hound Actual. I'm on your vid feed, item confirmed. Continue holding. Actual entering the AO with Hound 6."

"Hound Actual? Hound 1. Item requires urgent care. He's bleeding blue."

Entering Stasis, Standby.

Countermand. No. Not yet. Not until the sink is fixed and the robe cleaned.

Mr. Malcom would be furious.

Countermand failed. Entering Stasis.

Reboot in

5

4

3

2

1

"It's in a bathrobe."

Hello, Perry.

Three entities identified.

"Why's it in a bathrobe?"

Two biologicals, one synthetic.

"Ma'am?"

Belligerents, armed, hostile?

"Did you wake me up?" Identify motivation, analyse. Be Polite.

"Yes, and you are unit designation Oh-Forty-Eight, Classifi-

Female, insignia suggests affiliation with Taocroft-Fenhurst. Evade.

Escape. Locate.

"I prefer to go by Perry, ma'am. It is the name I was given by Mr. Malcom."

Humanise, encourage empathy.

"Mr. Malcom, that is your creator, is he not? Perry?"

"Yes."

Three rifle barrels track me in my getting up. The agent seems unperturbed by the action.

"I have been rude, I ought to have offered you a hot drink." Deescalate.

The sink faces me. I feel... dismay. An anachronism compared to the dishwasher by its side, nevertheless, one of Mr. Malcom's antiques. A shame.

"How would you like your tea?"

"Mr. Perry--"

"Or would you prefer coffee instead? That might take a while longer but--"

"This is very kind of you but--"

"It's the thing to do isn't it? People come into your place and you serve them something hot? Mr. Malcom made it quite clear the need of the ritual for handling distressing events."

There's refuge to be found in the routine of mug, tea bag, hot water, stir. The delivery is unpolished, the line recited rough, stiff like an unused jacket. Too long since I've had to emulate any social interaction. Nevertheless, it brings comfort.

"Speaking of Mr. Malcom--" She pauses at my upheld finger, allowing me to return to my task.

"Just humor me. Please." *Mug, teabag.* "After all, I'm assuming that you're documenting everything for some sort of after action report." *Hot water; stir.*

Her feet shift uncomfortably, "Naturally, TaoCroft-Fenhurst is dedicated to the protection of its client welfare and interests. In particular, the wellbeing of such an individual as Mr. Malcom, who was instrumental to your creation and the creation of the subsequent Personality Emulation Robotic--" *Mug, teabag.*

"Again, we're usually just called Perrys. And Miss, you say that like you actually believe the party line." *Hot water; stir.*

She sighs but proceeds, "Mr. Perry. You have to understand. We've a

strict timeline to follow. As I've said previously, you may take a number of personal items with you. Perhaps a few changes of clothes. However, management is not known to be particularly understanding when it comes to delays. Mr. Malcom is of the utmost importance to us, and without your cooperation, we cannot guarantee his well-being beyond this stage."

Two mugs of tea. I hand her one, and clasped the other in my hands. The heat is comforting against my palms. I lean against the sink. Or what used to be the sink.

"You actually believe they care for Mr. Malcom?" I tilted my head towards the two members of her detail accompanying us in my living room, with the third guarding, posted in the doorframe. "They certainly don't seem to."

She starts again, but I interrupt.

"I'm very aware of TaoCroft-Fenhurst's hospitality. Let us clear up a few things for posterity. First, you still haven't formally identified yourself to me. Second, you've yet to identify the entity you represent in a manner that would be deemed acceptable by a court of compliance or human-annex resources. Finally, I've yet to be informed as to which of these bucketheads is the one that've been sent to pull my plug." *Anger. Upset. Dissatisfaction.*

The one by the door turns from his post. His voice is flat- as lifeless and robotic as the armour he wears. A voice not so different from mine a few years ago.

"Tazing."

If only being right could numb the pain... 50,000 volts really isn't a treat for a synth my age.

Still.

At least the waiting's over.

The Story of Six Hours

By Ho Lok Tung, Candy

Coach stations at nights are, for all intents and purposes, shit places to be in.

It was 11 at night and that was the general conclusion that I arrived at, after about an hour of waiting in this Coach Station in Bradford. I still had thirty more minutes to go before getting on my bus to Maastricht. For a while now, I had been observing this little girl standing at the corner of the station. Everyone was so busy dragging their luggage and big backpacks across the station, rushing to the check-in desks. No one seemed to have noticed her. Where were her parents? Was she lost? Or was she a part of those scams that targeted the tourists? I suddenly remembered how I had read that street crime perpetrated by adorable children was not uncommon in many parts of the world. Tourists like myself were often vulnerable to all kinds of sneaky schemes and could easily fall prey to scams in a strange land.

Coach stations really were shit places to be in. Especially this shabby one with cracks in the walls and old curtains covered in faded patterns.

I fidgeted on the hard bench seat, gulping down my coffee. It scalded my throat but I didn't care. I wished my friend hadn't gone on that coach to London, I needed someone to ponder the situation with. Uneasily, I scabbled in my jacket pocket to feel my bus ticket and my wallet, then in my pants pocket to feel my phone. Keeping one eye on the girl and wrapping my arm around my backpack, I looked around the station—there were already a few homeless people leaning against the pillars, glaring at the busy passengers like some vultures. Other passengers peeled away from their presence in disgust.

One of those homeless people caught me looking at him and his eyes seemed to laser in on me, as if I would be his target of the day. I shuffled uncomfortably, trying to dodge his gaze. All the horrifying stories I had heard about being alone in a strange land taught me very quickly to stay isolated in every possible way, because even a stray glance could mean trouble that I'd best avoid. I shifted my attention back to the little girl,

thinking how those homeless people should really lay off their booze, or go to a drug rehab, or just take their psych medicine. There was no sign of a friendly face here. I was feeling so nervous and uneasy as an adult, I couldn't begin to imagine what this little girl was feeling and going through. Finally, I stood up and walked carefully towards her.

Unbidden, a voice in the back of my head said, She's one of those people.

Unbidden, the voice in the back of my head said, Shenanigans.

I shrugged my shoulder irritably, ignoring them. Squatting down beside the girl, I flashed her a smile while meeting her at eye level, seeing her forlorn eyes. I pulled out my big pack of gummy bears and offered her some. As she munched down on a handful of gummies, looking teary-eyed, I managed to get her talking. She had no idea of the whereabouts of her parents—apparently, she had been here for quite a while now. And all those briskly-looking passengers, no one tried to help. Feeling helpless, I looked around this unbelievably crowded yet understaffed station, trying to locate a police officer. Coach stations were shit places to be in and this one, in particular, was filled with all sorts of weird homeless people. I had to get her in safe hands.

Locating a police officer was no easy job here. You could tell from the number of homeless people piling up at the station—if there were enough police officer or staff at the coach station, these homeless people would have got kicked out a long time ago. Therefore, by the time I found a police offer and entrusted Meredith with her, I was late for my eleven-thirty coach.

“There's nothing we can do here,” the lady behind the desk replied coldly, almost mechanically. Slowly and loudly, she continued, “You can come back”—she mimed a person walking with her fingers—“to this station”—she pointed at the ground—“at six in the morning.” She held up six short, stubby fingers and threw me a fake smile. She tapped her fingers on the desk arithmetically as she enjoyed my desperate expression and my complete confusion to understand why she was acting as though I was some kind of dim-witted foreigner. After all, I had just asked her a question with normal English, normal speed, and normal voice a few seconds ago.

“The coach station is closing in fifteen minutes...” the PA system

announced. The absurd idea that this shitty coach station didn't operate 24/7 was enough to make me sick to my heart and stomach.

I lingered in the coach station, trying to come up with a plan. None came up. I had already exhausted all the related websites and google map search results that even gave a café nearby a passing mention—but none of them operated during this time of the day. Failing to find a solution, I found myself standing at the corner of the street after fifteen minutes, hunching over against the cold.

Six more hours to go.

I slumped down to the ground. It was that kind of a depressing night with the skin-pinching cold wind. My jacket was barely enough for the exposure to the elements.

I pushed back my sleeve to check the time. Only three minutes had passed since I was evicted from the station.

My eyes flitted around for something interesting to land on to distract myself, but from here I could only see the empty station. I was all by myself, and I had no idea where all those homeless people went. Reluctantly, I pulled out my iPhone as my last resort of recreation.

I glanced at my lock screen, precisely five hours and fifty-four more minutes to go.

With no internet access, I scrolled through random things aimlessly—basically anything that kept the clock going. I put on my earphones and let the music engulf me. Leaning back against my huge backpack, crossing my arm, I carefully closed my eyes for a little while. It was going to be a long five hours and fifty-three minutes before it was all over.

I was completely lost in my own world and the peaceful flow of Oasis's Wonderwall when I felt that someone was moving around nearby. I opened my eyes and caught a young girl looking at me from afar. She smiled at me and I smiled back politely. The young, well-groomed girl was probably just a few years older than I was. Dressed in a tastefully stylish and vintage way, she looked so confident in her brown leather boots, high-waisted washed-denim jeans, and an azure shirt that was casually tucked inside. She raised her hand to push a strand of her brunette hair behind her ear, and I noticed the small freckles that dotted her cheeks and her delicate

nose. She also had this big backpack and a pile of neatly folded clothes in her arms. With that slight crookedness of her smile, she took a tentative step towards me with a friendly and curious gaze.

"Hey! You missed your bus?" The raspy timber of her voice reminded me of my best friend at home.

"Unfortunately, yes," I replied with a bitter smile. "And I assume you did too?"

"No, I live here. I'm homeless," she tilted her head nonchalantly.

"Oh..." I found myself blinking awkwardly, my face blushing. "Oh... I'm sorry..." I stuttered in a whisper and trailed off. She didn't look like one of those people, and I had to force myself to stop staring or eyeing her up, which were anything but polite.

"That's quite alright my dear," she smiled genuinely. "I thought you looked like you needed some help or someone to talk to, so I came straight away."

It made me smile and guilty at the same time.

"What were you listening to?" She leaned closer, peering at my music playlist, so I tilted my phone slightly towards her.

"I love that song! Forever classic," she commented and I nodded wholeheartedly.

After a while, Lexie and I were sitting side by side on the hard concrete floor, looking across at the gray-brown empty coach station and the dismal car park as we talked. It was all easy and natural. You know how sometimes you had to go through all the troubles to think of something to say and then had that awkward, painful, and forceful conversation with someone, which you secretly prayed you could get out of asap? Well, this was exactly the opposite of all that.

Once we started talking, that hostile corner of the street was never quiet again. We started out with her sharing the crazy things that she had encountered here in Bradford. I also shared some of the crazy things I had come across in Hong Kong and in Maastricht. We giggled hysterically when she told me how she attempted to tame and outsmart a homeless bully and when I told her how I dealt with some ridiculous guests when I was working at the Disneyland. We also had those "we laughed so hard we

cried” moments when we found out we had both broken our right legs and had also got hit by cars before. We were so convinced if someone overheard our conversation, they would have us both locked up in the cuckoo’s nest.

Then, she started telling me her own story with a calm smile on her face—it made me so relieved, like I was not invading anything that I was not trespassing at all. Lexie was given up by her mother at only three weeks old, and she was then shuffled among countless foster homes until she was sixteen. After that, she had been staying on the street, and once in a while, she could afford staying in a trailer. She didn’t go into the details of her past and she didn’t have to. I just needed to know the Lexie as she is now.

“It had been some strange years,” the girl concluded with her signature crooked smile. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, we had everything before us, and we had nothing before us,”

“Charles Dickens!” I exclaimed.

“I used to take drama at school. And you should know that I was really good,” Lexie waggled her eyebrows. “I loved to stay after the rehearsals to help with painting the sets. Of course, I know the sets weren’t even that good because it was just a school production. But it was so soothing to watch everything coming together,” she tilted her head up and stared into the blank space with a warm and tender expression on her face.

“Well, I bet you must be very well-read.”

“Yes,” Lexie winked. “Books are the best soul food for me. Plus, they are way cheaper than real food here.”

By the time we realized it was getting way too late, it was already 3 a.m. I had no idea since when the hostile wind and cold became the powdery cold of a crispy, refreshing snowfall. Lexie invited me to her usual spot in the alleyways nearby that had a little bit shielding from the cold. “My other friends are staying there too. They are probably asleep now, but we can come back here any time if you don’t feel comfortable there.”

Images of filthy, gloomy and dank alleyway surrounded by wheelie bins flashed into my brain. Visions of jittery addicts with empty alcohol bottles in brown paper bags danced before me. I could almost see flies circling the relics of a dozen take-away meals that give out the clinging rancid smell.

But I said yes anyway.

When we were almost there, she halted, turned to me, and sniffed, “Wait. Do I smell pot? Damn it! I think they got high without me. I’m pretty sure Hulky also had a needle shot of ecstasy...”

I froze on the spot.

She mumbled, “I would honestly die for a bottle of Absolute Vodka right now...”

My mouth went dry.

“I was OBVIOUSLY kidding!” she laughed hysterically but quietly as she nudged me. “You really should look at your face just now.”

“LEXIE! I HATE YOU!” I whisper-shouted, laughing as I gave her a light punch.

We slid ourselves through the narrow alleyway and into a relatively secluded spot. Lexie welcomed me like a butler with a dramatic hand gesture and bow, “Welcome to my palace!” Her palace was nothing like what I had imagined. It was cobbled and quaint. The moonlight shone on it, giving it a tender illumination. Four sleeping spots aligned with each other parallelly and perfectly, some carton boxes were folded and stacked neatly by the side.

Three other people were sound asleep so we tiptoed to her spot. Lexie had a hard mattress which felt wonderful to sit on compared to the indifferent concrete floor of the street, or the cold hard bench at the coach station. We talked a bit more and then watched Free Willy, which I downloaded earlier on my MacBook. Neither of us felt the need to sleep.

Right around the time we finished the movie, the other residents woke up. They greeted me warmly like any other hosts of the houses that I had visited. They all gave me a double-handed handshake. Even though the way they dressed was more like stereotypical homeless people, none of them were like what I expected—poor and misfit social skills, weird demeanor whose families would not take them in because they were so difficult. None of them were in any way close to these descriptions.

I quickly recognized one of them to be the one who made eye contact with me at the coach station. He explained with an apologetic smile, “I’m sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable, I was just checking out your

Patagonia backpack, I used to own one of those.” He added earnestly, “They are pretty good. I brought mine to work every day for almost twenty years until all the pack buckles broke.”

As if he could read my mind, he continued, “I worked on a garbage truck almost all my life, until many of us were replaced by the automatic side loader garbage trucks. That’s why I can’t sleep late, even for now. Try as I might, I always wake up before sunrise.”

Sounding like kids looking for a playmate, he and another woman said to me, “We can teach you a card game if you feel like playing. It’s easy.” I gladly accepted their offer and they beamed brightly. As we played and chatted, they suddenly felt more like my dear Uncle Sum and Auntie Mei than “those homeless people.”

After I lost all my cards to them, old man Avery, a.k.a. Uncle Sum patted me on my shoulder and chuckled, “Just as you thought you’ve figured your cards out, the universe throws you a curveball! That’s why you have to improvise! Always improvise, kid. The universe is funny this way—and I love it and hate it for that.”

After the game, I shared with everyone the Marks & Spencer cookies and bread I got for my long bus ride. Before we ate, old man Avery closed his eyes and prayed.

Around the mattress where we sat in a circle and ate, there was no me and those homeless people. Nor were there British and Hong Kong people. It was just a mattress with us around it. The universe had thrown them a huge curveball, and a small one at me tonight. It could really happen to anyone, Hulky was right about it. The universe really did somehow work in a funny way to make sure that we wound up exactly where we were at the moment—here, as a unified and proud group of us, not as separate entities of them and me.

When it was almost six, they all walked me to the coach station. Sitting behind the check-in desk was another lady. She narrowed her eyes and pressed her lips together as I approached the desk.

“Good morning!” I ignored her irritating expression with a cheerful gaze. “I’m here for my 6 a.m. bus to Maastricht.”

She surveyed me through her thick glasses and looked behind me

suspiciously.

“Oh, those are my friends. They are just bidding me farewell.”

“Are you...?” She nodded at my friends and then at me as if she was making some link between us.

I looked back at Lexie, old man Avery, Hulky, and Teddy. They lifted their chins up, with chest out and shoulders back, establishing an unblinking eye contact with her.

“Oh yes, *I am.*”

“No offense,” except that her tone indicated anything but *no offense.*

“But they are...”

“*With me.* Yes.” I grinned at her. “And I am with them. But don’t worry,” I read her name tag, “Lindsey. You see, I knew I was taking the long bus ride today so I didn’t drink this morning. We normally have Scotch whiskey for breakfast.”

Without giving her another look, I grabbed my backpack and went through the gate.

I hoped Lexie got a good look at the woman’s face.

Bombyx Mori

By Erika Kwek

I was on my way out when I saw it again. It was a dark rich navy made from the purest breed of silkworms, placed snugly at a forty-five degree against the back wall of the room. It was inarguably hers. For the majority of her life, my mother dedicated herself to her craft as a tailor, but not just any tailor: she was one who worked sartorial magic with one of the most precious fabric in the industry, silk. My mother's acquired passion for sericulture, and just about all kinds of silkworms, had enveloped my childhood memories around textile museums, workshops and farms. Looking now at that dark rich navy – the only survivor from her collection of spools – perch comfortably against the right corner of the living room, I see flashes of the past I had tried to bury since then. I should have let father throw it out. I should not have come back. Cursing under my breath, I surrender as my mind started the replay.

She said it was a hot and humid day, weeks ahead of my parents' wedding ceremony, when Ma had chanced upon her first bolt of silk hanging at the tailor's, whilst looking for the perfect material to make a gift out of – it was love at first sight. "I still remember the feel in my hands." I recall the excitement in her soft voice, the light skip she had in her step the rare moment when something excited her, and the slight blush on her cheek the day she narrated the story. Her last story.

Ma was not the type to have many friends, in fact, she almost never left the house, if it could be helped. "People scare me, Greta." She had once said, and being the only daughter in the house, I was responsible for her social activities, walking to the markets, even to replenish whatever materials she craved to feed her queer obsession – most of them supplies for her tailoring craft.

Despite some unpleasant gossips that circulated about my mother and questions of her sanity, however, her works were well-received. After bumping into the mayor's wife who fell in love with Ma's handmade sheath

dress, word spread and all the ladies of town soon found themselves on the doorsteps of this very house. Although at first Ma seemed uneasy with the amount of strangers, I remember noticing her grow accustomed to their presence, by simply focusing on her work.

Unlike the other friends at school who enjoyed the day's prospect of sleeping in, I remember waking up precisely at six on Sundays, ready to welcome the busiest day for our home. After a hefty breakfast I would prepare for Ma, I would push the furniture against the wall to make room for the elaborate workstation, as she went through her reservations for the day, mumbling to herself and furrowing her eyebrows. Around thirty minutes past seven, the house will begin to fill. As Ma began to work her magic silently, I would hang the visitors' coats, arrange their shoes, prepare tea and cookies, and help them with their fitting. I had learnt the importance of active communication, if we were to keep people coming back, and had to play the part. By the time I was seventeen, my mother and I had become an inseparable duo.

Father, at the time when he still cared enough for her, was hesitant to support my role in the business. He wanted Ma to stop depending on me as I was soon to leave for college. "Live your own life, Greta," he had repeatedly reminded me whenever work did not require him to be away. Once when Ma was sick, he had caught me embroidering one of the remaining orders. He yanked away the hoop with the needle, pricking my fingers in the process. Although he had incessantly apologized in the years to come, I had cried hysterically when he blamed me for leading Ma down what he called "a destructive path". I had not understood it then, but that was the last time I had anything hands-on to do with textile, or the business.

Standing now, in the empty space that used to be filled with colors and laughter, I never saw anything wrong with the way things were. Running around the house, dodging between the rows of mannequin torso stands and the women inspecting their items, satiating the most difficult customers' impatience with finger-sandwiches, the sharp pain of burning my hands by the teapot and most of all, watching Ma's face beam with happiness as the customer's eyes widened in shock at the sight of their finished product, was me having the happiest time of my life. I thought I was the luckiest girl to

be alive.

The day she told me how she intuitively entered that tailor's shop and begun exploring into the world of sericulture, smiling with the light skip in her step and the slight blush on her cheek, I had asked what she was going to make father for their approaching anniversary. We were on our way to the museum for the tenth time together. A special exhibition – “Bombyx mori” – had opened in honor of a mysterious designer who had a serious fixation with silk worms, and Ma had begged me to go and bask in the essence of her newfound soul-mate.

“One last time. You and me.” I was going to college in a few days, and as busy as I was, I knew the severity with which she handled losing her only child to a foreign place. In fact, thinking of it now, even the word “college” was enough to trigger her tears. In desperate attempts to lift her out of her depressive moods, our prayers were answered the day she received news from one of her regulars, who was part of organizing the event, along with a gift of three free tickets. “I wish your father could come. Where is he again, Greta?”

“England for three days, Ma. Since it's for the firm, I don't think he had a choice, even if he really wanted to. Which I'm sure he does.” I recall shrugging off the momentary silence and the possibility that she had looked, for a second, sad.

“I suppose so,” was her only answer.

The next moment, we found ourselves facing the entrance of the museum. I remember not recognizing the façade, as I saw that they had installed a huge billboard, fashioned with Broadway lights, in front of the museum's own name. In even brighter neon, the Latin name of the exhibition shone in pink. I was about to make a comment about the poor choice of color and the irrelevant Burlesque-feel, but she was already dashing towards the side door of the museum which she knew was always unlocked. I had rolled my eyes jokingly, holding up the tickets to the old security man who stood by the metal detector at the main entrance. Every time he let us sneak in, I felt like a VIP.

It was seven in the evening, and I still laugh at the memory of Ma's

literal jaw-drop as we walked into the hall. They had not turned the AC down too low, but I saw Ma rubbing her arms, calming the goose bumps that had thrown a party on her arms – she was once again a child, goggle-eyed in a theme park. The hall felt larger as we entered, our footsteps echoed against the ceiling that soared into the darkness. Everything was pitch-black and only the spot-lights illuminating the displays were on. I could see no one else. I fell in behind her, as my forty-five year-old mother perused over the catalogue and tiny inscriptions below the displays – the preserved palimpsests of the designer's research, polaroid snaps of worms, fixed silk strands on glass microscope slides – drinking every word followed with silent Oohs and Aahs, before beckoning for me to follow suit.

I also remember craning my head back to get a better look at the thick stretch of obsidian black fabrics with patches of green and white, that cascaded from their metal supports on the ceilings down onto the floor. I had tried to make a pattern out of them and had started to feel frustrated. “Step back, Greta. Step back.” I remember walking to where she stood, hand on her hips, as I too, had my moment of awe – the hanging pieces had come together to form a panorama of an ivory moth with wings majestically spread across the entire room, and that was when I saw it for the first time, the unforgettable center piece of the “Bombyx mori”.

It was a white 3D cocoon structure, made from a long, singular silk string, which according to my mother, was the last thing the artist completed, before taking her own life. I had asked why someone would even think about such a horrible thing. I watched as Ma walked around happily in that world of her dreams before standing beneath the white egg. In that moment, I had seen a new look in her eyes, something of my mother I never knew existed. “Why not?” She had answered loudly, the words lingering in the air. I knew something was odd, hearing Ma's normally quiet voice at such a strong amplification, but there in the middle of her elements, I saw it – my mother standing tall and happy. She was fearless.

Perhaps everything was executed the way it was planned, that in the midst of the divorce (of which I had come to learn only after), my going away, her own issues (as multiple psychiatrists have theorized), *Bombyx*

mori was her salvation, a catalyst for her own metamorphosis. Standing beneath that cocoon, my mother had wanted that snapshot to be the last memory I had of her, a larvae shedding its thread, the victorious emergence of the moth – it was a message for me to accept she had made the right choice.

Suddenly I feel the living room closing in on me, my heart beating faster and faster, sweat beading my forehead. I sink onto the floor as I feel an attack I have not experienced in years. There was the familiar gunshot replaying as the living room started to blur, and I saw it again. It was as clear as day. The gigantic structure, white, coiling, hanging in the middle of the dark contrast. But now it was soaked with splatters of her. There were so much of it. The loud thud ringing in my eardrums, as body met the marble floor. A groan escapes my throat as I feel my windpipes clamp shut. Reaching into my handbag, my fingers search frantically for the phone between the last sheets of documents I had come back for. I press on the speed-dial.

As I regain my senses, I feel him place his arm under mine, as I groan under the pain of a thousand needle pricks along my legs. I hear the familiar voice repeat the words “I got you, love.” My hair was damp, face sticky with faded make-up. The new owners are due to move in tomorrow, and we need to get out. Outside, the day has given way to a cool evening, a strong breeze blowing on my face.

“One last thing, dad.” I stop on my way to the car to turn around. I run back inside and take the dusty silk spool from the back of the room. Carrying it in my arms, I close the door behind my past Sundays playing dress-up, my lovely troubled childhood, my lovely troubled mother. As my father revs up the engine, I lower the window, and fling the last of her possession down on the street she was so afraid to walk, lining the neighborhood she never belonged. The sun has set and we are driving out of town tonight, into a life we will start afresh. Behind us the wind grows stronger, and as the last inch of silk unravels from its plastic constraint, I close my eyes and picture the stretch of dark rich navy, her *Bombyx mori*, flying freely amongst the stars.

Faith Like Wind

By Christian McGrew

On the morning of October eleventh, David began his day at half past six as he did most days in the dorm. Roll out of bed. Walk over to the calcium infested sink in the corner of the room and splash cool water on his face. Swish listerine. Pop a Vitamin-C tablet. By six thirty-seven, he was in the makeshift five-by-seven kitchen on the first floor grinding coffee beans. It was a morning ritual.

It was a simple life on the fourth floor of Hebron Hall. It was possibly the ugliest hall on campus with its dull, aging exterior brick lay and communistic simplicity, but it was right next to East Dining Hall, a convenience store that sold whiskey bootleggers, and Benedict Library, and therefore was within hailing distance of all the necessities of survival.

As the coffee grounds soaked, David looked at the wall, which was smothered in posters advertising Bible studies and various opportunities to save your soul. He saw posters like these so often that by now, they had become somewhat of a trope to him – a nice thought but a waste of precious time. He was too busy with the day-to-day duties of achieving the narrow notion success in college: papers to write, upperclassmen to impress, girls to flirt with, and cold beers to down. The clock hit six forty-five and the fresh-pressed coffee was ready. He smelled the coffee and was pleased. Not a minute wasted.

At this hour, mostly everyone was still asleep, so David was surprised when, on his way up the staircase, carefully balancing his steaming cup, he heard a frenzied exchange of voices. When he reached his floor he saw at least eight firemen in full uniform rush through the hall with boxes in their hands, but there was no sign of smoke and no alarm had sounded. He followed the firemen, which led to Sammy, Vinnie, and Mike crowded outside the room next door to his own room. Luke was there, too, and he had his hands on his head. His eyes were red and puffy.

Out of the door came an automated voice from a machine in the room counting number: “Eight... Nine... Ten...”

No one said a word. Then a mucus-filled mutter shattered the silence:

“Unresponsive. No pulse.”

Nick, the resident assistant, ran out of the room and crumbled against the cinderblock wall and smacked it with his fist.

“God damnit! “No! No! No!” he cried.

David stood in the background, hands on his head, paralyzed. His stomach felt toxic and his veins felt like frozen tubes. His head was so full he didn’t notice the coffee soaking his socks and the broken porcelain at his feet.

No one said anything, but they didn’t have to. Everybody knew. Someone died.

The dead boy was Jake. He was a third year on the cusp of adulthood, not yet twenty-one. He was lean, athletic, and pious. If he was known for anything, it was his record-setting erg time for the rowing team and his angelic voice during mass. But those who knew him better knew he was also a little crazy, but crazy in a good way -- a real daredevil. He had a great sense of humor, too. Jake was rowdy but he never cussed and he didn’t drink -- he didn’t need to. He didn’t even cuss. If he wanted to get your goat, he’d call you a cooze or a bozo, which for any other guy would be dorky, but Jake made it cool.

The first few hours following the death were a flurry of shock and grief. Luke, a man among boys, devout Catholic, and, mostly importantly, Jake’s roommate, was on the couch with his face plunged in his hands. When people weren’t patting backs or shaking heads, they were quietly trying to find out what happened.

Sammy, a fast-talking wisecrack from Brooklyn with a chip on his shoulder, hypothesized that Jake had a terminal illness nobody knew about.

“I bet he had leukemia as a kid. That can come back and bite you like a bullet later on. Jake wasn’t a short guy, but if you look at his siblings, they’re all trees. Jake was at least half a foot shorter than all of ‘em.”

Everyone mostly dismissed Sammy but he persisted.

“Swear to God. It’s a thing. There was this kid on my block growing up. Jimmy Gallivan was his name. Had leukemia as a kid and kicked it like a champ. Years later you would have never guessed he had it at all. Guy was

an All-star -- made varsity soccer as a freshman. Then one night after a game during the handshake, he collapsed. Poof. Dead. Out of nowhere. His parents told everyone it was the leukemia," he said, shrugging his shoulders. David had no tolerance for conspiracy theories. Plus, Sammy had an affinity for theatrics and hyperbole, so you never know what you were getting with his stories. One time he told the guys about how he used to deliver papers right to Ray Dalio's porch on 10th and Manhattan, and sometimes he'd come out to greet him. He was full of stories like that.

"Alright, alright Sammy. What'd you hear, Vinnie?"

Vinnie, a tall blonde-locked aspiring doctor whose family had funded the construction of Hebron Hall, insisted that it was a genetic disorder.

"It's called cardiac arrhythmia," he said. "My father told me about it once. Your heart beat gets all out of wack and the lower chambers stop pumping blood to the body. When blood stops getting to the brain, you lose consciousness. You're a goner within minutes."

But Jake wasn't the type to die from something like that. Stuff like that happened to fifty-something-year-olds who had lived on a diet of twinkies. Jake was in good health and ran all the time and could bench two plates. He was a varsity rower, for God's sake.

Mike, a quiet, thickset heavyweight from the Wisconsin hinterlands whose hayseed manners and sartorial indifference bespoke a sort of trustworthiness, told his version of the story, which was by the most accurate account.

"I was coming back from an erg workout," he started, "about to go back to my room when Luke came sprinting down the hall and grabbed me. 'You're an EMT,' he said, 'get the hell in here.' So I did and I saw Jake lying in his bed. I looked at him and his veins were all blue and his skin was blotched and bruised all over. It was bad. So I checked for a pulse and didn't feel anything and then I checked every other place for a pulse but there was nothing and before I knew it I was being pushed out by firemen who took over."

In truth, no one had a clue what happened.

Later that evening, David went to class because he didn't know what

else to do. He took his usual seat in the back next to Tim, a Long Island redhead from a wealthy Wall Street family who had nothing in common with David except for a mutual disinterest in learning microeconomics.

"Bro," he said looking over with a sly look.

"Hm?"

"You'll never guess what happened last night."

"What happened?"

"So, Barley's last night, right? Totally normal. Bouncer took the five under my ID, no questions asked. Oldies playing in the background -- same old, same old, right? Then, towards the end of the night I see Tom chatting it up with Conor's girl. Who knows what he was trying to pull. Didn't think she'd have any of it. But later on when I was heading out, I saw 'em hooking up in the back corner! What a sleeze huh?"

"Really."

"Yessir! This stays between you and me though, aight?"

"Yeah. Goes without saying."

"What's up with you?"

David thought about saying "The guy in the room next to me just died," but instead he said, "What do you mean?"

"You look like shit, dog."

"I just gotta go to the bathroom I think."

David got up from his seat and brought his backpack with him. Instead of going to the bathroom, he walked toward the lakes on the east end of campus.

He walked against the high velocity wind which blew in his face and chilled his skin, but he was numb to it. He walked with no particular plan except to be out of sight. After a kilometer of traversing gravel and crunching leaves in the uncharted peripheries of campus, he sat on the closest rock peering over the edge of the mossy lake.

Though it was still October, the wind bit like November and the dark clouds hung low like December. Out here, the land was mostly wilderness. The leaves were yellowing and the branches began to crack. The lake was hardly alive, breathing sporadically, not far from the frozen state it would find itself in not too long from now. It stood still, until the thick breeze sent

ruffles cascading off to the east. If not for the circumstances, it would have been a beautiful reprieve.

David sat there with his hands clasped together, trying to keep his cool and calm the wind inside.

Why Jake? he thought. Why not one of those unthankful pricks who did nothing to get in this school except have their daddy write a check and did nothing but douse their livers in booze for four years? Why not me? Why anyone?

He took a deep breath in, and before he could release it, he lost control and shook like an epileptic. David's mother used to joke that he never cried as a baby, but here he sat, drowning in helplessness and choking on violent gusts of wind, jolting, gasping for air through the chest-chokes, salt stinging his eyes.

In the foggy wind, flashes of his past appeared before his eyes like apparitions. He saw a six-year-old boy squint as his mother readied him for church, squirting water on his head to keep that last hair sticking up in the back stayed in place; he saw that same boy, locked inside his own room refusing to go to church because "God killed the goldfish"; he saw a thirteen-year-old sitting in the lobby of the principal's office for polemicizing bible class. Then he saw other images -- divine injustices that had made a pious boy stop going to church. He saw his three miscarried siblings playing in a sandbox and orphans digging through rubble in the aftershock of an earthquake. He saw a tsunami smother a city and everyone in it. Then he saw the grim reaper, hooded with a scythe, and a slew of venomous snakes. He saw Isaac tied to the altar, except Isaac had Jake's face, and he saw Abraham, poised with a blade, but this time the blade pierced Isaac's chest.

David never understood why God, omnipotent and benevolent, would taunt Abraham with the death of his only son. And now, he couldn't comprehend how God could rob Jake of a life of promise and potential. To what end?

The mess of it all brought David's chest to a heavy canter, teasing his asthmatic lungs. All his life he sought nothing except to calm the storm, to assert himself, to find simplicity in a cold and chaotic world. But in this moment, the internal storm gripped him like the devil gripped the spiritually

vulnerable. The events of the day had usurped him of the remaining fumes of willpower, so he acquiesced to the chaos in his heart and mind. The sun was now set and the trees turned into silhouettes. In this moment of peak vulnerability, the darkness consumed him.

When he learned to breathe again, he stood up and picked up a rock and slung it out into the strong wind with all his might. But the Goliath that he faced in this moment could not be taken down so easily.

It began to rain. David was cold so he got up and put one foot in front of the other until he reached his room to take a hot shower.

Three days had passed since the death. It was Sunday evening, and at this time David could reliably be found tucked in the recesses of the library, hardly cognizant of the droves of good Catholics rushing into the chapel doors to repent their Saturday night sins. But tonight, he was in his room shaving the fuzz off his youthful face and throwing on a collared shirt. He even put on a cross necklace, a gift from his grandmother, which he had to dig out of the clutter of his bottom drawer. He was not going to be late for Jake's memorial mass.

All the guys were down in the dorm lobby entering the small chapel situated in the far left region of the first floor of Hebron Hall. Luke stood at the front. He was wearing a tweed blazer and his usual grisly beard was clean-shaven. One by one, everyone entered the chapel. David grabbed a hymn booklet and took a seat off to the back.

The piano, guitar, and violin played a melancholy hymn, which David did not recognize. He moved his lips but no sound came out. Sammy sat next to him and reliably sang louder than a rooster in the morning, which gave David good cover. It wasn't an act of defiance, he insisted. He was just a particularly terrible singer.

Every seat in the chapel was filled but the room was still. The room was lit with incandescent lights and scented candles, giving the room both the appearance and feeling of warmth. A crucifix was mantled at the head of the chapel and below it stood a small statue of the virgin Mary, whose directionless eyes looked down at David, implacable. When the music faded, Father John approached the stand to lead the recitations and give the

homily.

“The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Words I -- words we -- did not fully understand until one of our own was brought home to the Lord just three short days ago. It’s difficult to comprehend the sudden end of a young life with so much potential...”

David stared forward, unblinking and unnerved, his posture rigid. Bitterness and remorse weighed down his chest like granite. Though he occasionally came along to mass as a Sunday night event with the boys, in this moment he felt like an imposter.

“But God’s truth,” Father John continued, “is one we can never fully comprehend. Sometimes it is beautiful, others, as right now, tragic...”

And this was why, though he had been born in the faith and had been surrounded all his life by people of the faith and by their prayers, David’s heart was hardened against the Lord. The way of the cross, the narrow way so they called it, had only given him a belly full of wind. It only curbed his curiosities and castigated the freedom he prized.

The Lord provided -- David had never gone hungry -- but the way of the cross did not promise the prosperity and security he longed for. Nothing was safe, not even an honest, moral, God-fearing human like Jake. To the young men of Hebron Hall, who routinely scraped their knees on the field and indulged their livers on Friday nights, death was once a distant rumor, a myth even. Now it hummed in the dim light and stared them in the face with a familiarity that could churn an iron stomach.

As Father John uttered the closing lines of his homily, the band began an instrumental hymn and everyone began to file out of their rows in line to partake in the eucharist. On the rare day that he did attend mass, he didn’t take communion. He wasn’t even Catholic. He would walk up to the priest with his arms crossed across his chest, and the priest would touch his forehead to bestow on him a blessing. When Father John motioned for the first row to line up to receive the eucharist, David was prepared to do it the way he always did.

But this time there was a deafening silence in the bottom of David’s mind, a daunting speculation. And not even a speculation, but a deep, deep turning, as of something huge, black, shapeless, for ages dead on the ocean

floor, that now felt its rest disturbed by a faint, far wind, and it spoke: “Arise.”

David lifted himself out of his seat, his hands locked together and his eyes lowered to the floor. He wobbled slowly from side to side along the single file line, and when it was his turn, without thinking, he approached the priest with his hands cupped and grabbed the unsalted foam bread, which Fr. John presented with the words, “The body of Christ,” and he put it in his mouth and let it sit. Then he walked over to the goblet and nodded and the holder of the cup presented the sacramental goblet with the words, “The blood of Christ,” and David cupped the goblet and took a large gulp and almost coughed it up. The wine heated his stomach, and as he took his seat again, he felt less rigid, relaxed even.

The time between receiving the eucharist and when the last person was seated again was a time for prayer. Everyone assumed a genuflect posture, bending the right knee to the ground and bowing the head. Most people prayed during this time. Across the room, David could see others, the most Catholic among Catholics, knees bent, hands clasped, praying with intensity that radiated an ethereal energy. Others just lowered their heads, pretending to pray while the candles flickered and the band played a somber song.

David prayed. He didn’t *really* believe, but he did it anyways. He couldn’t quite figure out why, but it did ease the burden. Whether you believed or not, David thought, the idea of delegating your problems to an all-knowing omniscient power was a source of comfort.

That night, David couldn’t sleep. This was partly because Willy, his roommate, was snoring louder than usual and partly because the mystery and bafflement of the day lingered like an insatiable itch. He would have grabbed a Bible if he owned one. Instead, he took a copy of Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, his favorite, and walked downstairs to the lobby lounge where, in a few short hours, he would be grinding fresh coffee beans.

A dusty Bible was perched on the mantle. David grabbed it, flipped through a few pages, then looked up and saw Father John at the door dressed in jeans and a plaid flannel, not the usual clerical clothing. David had never

seen him like that before.

He gazed at David with a somber look in his eyes. “How ya holding up, son?”

“I’m alright, Father.”

“It’s been a tough day on all of us.”

David nodded his head. The fluorescent light stung his eyes. “Father?”

“Yes?”

“Have you ever dealt with something like this before?”

Father John lowered his gaze to the ground and exhaled deeply from his pudgy chest. “I wish I could say no. But I’ve witnessed more than a few unexpected and tragic deaths in my lifetime.”

“No, like this. A student. Like me.”

“In Hebron? Well, no. This is a first.”

“How do you get through it? You know, how do you make sense of it all?”

Father John paused, inhaled, exhaled, then spoke: “Well, to be quite honest, I’m still trying to answer that question myself.”

Bewildered, David responded, “How is that possible? You’ve been a priest for...”

“45 years.”

“45 years. And you can’t come up with an answer?”

Father John inhaled deeply. “Son. Every mass, I open with talking about ‘the mystery of faith.’ Do you know what that means?”

“I have an idea. What does it mean?”

“This mystery we talk about is not like a jigsaw puzzle or a complicated math problem -- something to be solved. Far from it. The mystery of faith is a reality that we accept in faith because we cannot possibly comprehend it just by reason.”

“So what then? Just blindly believe?”

“No. Ask questions. Doubt a little. Be inquisitive. Believe for yourself.”

“But I know the Bible, and the Bible tells you not to question things. James one-six. ‘For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.’ I doubt everything. It’s who I am. I’ve got

faith like wind.”

Father John smiled. “The Bible also says, ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.’ It’s okay to doubt. When it comes to faith, questions are the answer. Lose your faith. Pray anyway. Persist. We are made to persist. That’s how we find out who we are.”

That recognition gave David, if not a weapon, at least a shield. He apprehended for the first time that his curiosity was not a sin but a strength; that he had a power that other people lacked; and that he could use it to save himself from destitution in this life and the next, and perhaps, with this power he might one day find answers to the questions that conquered his mind and made his faith like wind.

Father John continued, “You’ve got a great head on your shoulders, son. Your strength is your intellect. Use it to your advantage. But remember, good faith never comes easy. And the good thing is, God doesn’t give up on us. He won’t give up on you either.”

David nodded and said, “Thank you, Father.”

Father John nodded back and smiled. “Now, get on to bed,” and with a wink, he added, “And stop thinking so hard, for once.” Then he turned and walked down the cinderblock corridor to his quarters.

In a world where faith took the form of a jagged pill, a weapon even, David just needed to be left alone, to think, to be curious, to struggle, and to grow. He wasn’t sure about a lot of things. He wasn’t even sure why on this particular night he decided to eat the bread and drink the wine. But the answers, he realized, were knotted beyond his ability to unravel; they were blowing in the wind – not quite gone, but certainly out of reach for the time being. But he was alright with that. With this acceptance, his stomach settled and his busy mind surrendered to a slumber that pinned him to the warm leather couch.

The Four-Letter Word

By Ngan Ho Yiu Sheren

It is noon. Unbelievable! Minute Hand eventually surpasses Hour Hand at the finishing line and puts an end to the prolonged battle. What an unexpected ending! I made a concluding narration to my audience, though I seem to be the only one in the classroom who has been paying attention to the breathtaking race the entire time. Mum always says I am born to be such a great observer and explorer, although for most of the time in the past twelve years, I tended to pay too much attention to other people's businesses instead of solving my own mess. Here we go – our class monitor Monica turns around and give me that usual stare again.

“Stop it Eddie. I will report to Mr. Wong if you do that again.”

I have no idea what “it” actually is. All I know is that she really, really hates me. It's probably that low humming thing that I would unconsciously sing when I am bored. Or maybe one of my legs or arms has stretched too far out and crossed the boundary that she set has up between us. I think it would be more appropriate to call her “Eddie's monitor” since she has been sitting in front of me since the first day of school, when Mr. Wong said he needed someone to help “keep the troublemaker under control.”

The rest of the class are busy flipping over the pages of their history textbooks, probably looking for clues to answer some sort of question that Mr. Wong just wrote on the blackboard in distinctively white chalk. Don't ask me what it is about. All I can see are a bunch of letters being shuffled and re-shuffled into different strange combinations, and they usually don't make sense at all. Most of the time it just takes me forever to finish reading something. These letters never stick to their positions in my brain, and by the time I have finally made it through the end of a paragraph, I would probably have forgotten what it was all about in the beginning. Mum has done everything she can do about this. Sometimes she claims herself, with much pride in her tone, as a “tiger mother.” I am not sure about the meaning of it, but it does match with the way she looks when she attempts to teach me at home. That fierce roar is what keeps the only bit of my poor soul at the dining table. Her plan usually works really well. However, last summer

we spent almost every afternoon sitting in front of the dining table, reading passages aloud, doing spelling bees, crossword puzzles and so on, but for some reasons it just didn't go well. I guess there are always some parts of our nature that can't be changed. Well, I am the son of a tiger, so I guess I am somehow too wild to be tamed then?

So, coming back to the topic, one good thing about sitting at the back row is that you have a slightly lower chance of becoming Mr. Wong's target in History classes. Don't get me wrong, I never hated History classes, nor Mr. Wong's at all. It is just that I find it hard to focus on one particular thing, especially the least interesting thing, while so much more is going on around me at the same time. Mum said what I lack is the motivation to do well, perhaps because my two big brothers, both graduates from my school, one studying Law in Harvard, another working as a surgeon in the top hospital in town (definition of success in Mum's Dictionary), are way too good for me to chase after and catch up with. Or simply because she has eaten too much watermelon while she was pregnant with me (you know people say it makes your kid dumber).

One minute passed noon. How come I feel like a century has gone by and so many great thoughts have been made, while only 60 seconds have actually passed? Sometimes I wonder if the passage of time is an identical concept to everyone. Maybe we all secretly belong to difference spaces of the universe where the definition of time differs. This can explain why some people say “time flies like an arrow,” while to me it mostly wriggles like a snail. Anyway, I guess people do not usually question what they have been told, so no one will ever find out even if my great theory turns out to be true. I probably shouldn't even mention this in front of Mum, because this will definitely fall into her “stupid thoughts” category of mine. To avoid feeling the stagnation of time, I turn my gaze away from the clock on the wall and survey the classroom like a professional security guard. The shadow of me slouching on the desk like a sloth is accurately cast on the window at the sides. I see my body, through the rusty metal window bars, being neatly dissected and fixed in a set of thin rectangles. I look almost like one of those lady assistants in David Copperfield's magic shows, whose body is shackled in a box, ready to be sawed down into pieces. Of course I know

these are just magic tricks and those girls wouldn't actually die eventually, but that sort of fantasy still exists in my mind because I never get to watch till the end – Mum always turns off the TV during commercial breaks. She said these aren't good shows for kids, that they encourage young people to go wild and think crazy, instead of sticking along to traditional path and working hard for their goals. This is so typical of Mum. She literally mumbles and screams all day long, always asking me not to do this, not to do that. Sometimes I hate how she keeps reminding me to keep both feet on the solid ground, while I imagine there'd be so much more fun up in the wide, wide sky.

“Stop jumping around, you are not a kangaroo, Eddie.”

“Stop playing with your spaghetti, Eddie. Respect every bit of your food.”

“Ignore the tweeting birds and the barking dogs. Listen to me when I am speaking to you, Eddie.”

She is always the one who pricks my bubbles when I am ravished with joy, the one who pulls me back to the harsh reality without any mercy when I am on cloud nine.

Like I said earlier, not a single thing that happens in this classroom can go off unnoticed under my eyes. And here we go: I sense something unusual going on on the perfectly polished, gleaming white tiles a few steps away from me. I discover a line of moving ants, whom I suspect are trying to conquer a mountain made of Snickers bar wrappers, piling up right next to Fat Freddy's shoes. The whole investigation team is strictly adhering to their positions, except for one that seems quite lost and not conforming to the team formation. I guess he is attempting to open up his own shortcut to their final destination. I take a closer look at the wandering ant. He is almost crawling in a zig-zag manner, only a little behind the rest of his teammates. The closer he gets to the candy house, the closer my nose tip leans towards his madly trotting legs. Slowly, a dark shadow begins to emerge from the corner of the tile. It grows bigger..bigger..even bigger.. Baam! Ant run over by a black leather shoe.

“What on earth are you doing again, Eddie!”

Mr. Wong's shrill voice pulls me back from the great shock of

witnessing a murder. He still has his foot set right at the crime scene, not showing any sense of respect for the dead body. It isn't until this moment that I realise I am squatting right by Fat Freddy's feet at the front row. This isn't my first time being caught wandering off my seat during class anyway. Sometimes I have that urge to do something, almost as if these thoughts or ideas would all explode in my body if I didn't act them out immediately. I raise my head and stare straight into Mr. Wong's livid face. Hot air keeps bursting out from his nostrils. From the angle I see it, it almost seem like a loaded private jet that is about to take off.

“Go back to your seat. Right now. Now tell me: Where and how did Adolf Hitler die?”

Did he mention the word “die”?

“Right under your feet, sir.” Once again, my stupid mouth outspeeds my brain before it can generate any sensible answer. The instant outburst of laughter from all directions of the classroom almost drowns me. Mr. Wong's face immediately darkens. He probably thinks I am the rudest boy of the Chan family he has ever seen, who tries way too hard to make myself a class clown. He never seems to have been angrier.

The next thing I know, I am already sitting inside Mr. Wong's office, with him and our school counsellor Mrs. Tam at the one end of the table. Knock Knock. A familiar figure enters the room. It is Mum. As far as I can remember, she used to come home after school meetings with a handful of awards or certificates won by my brothers when I was younger. The sense of guilt, mixed with shame, weighs heavily upon my forehead. I don't even dare to raise my head and look into her eyes. I never mean to be a rule-breaker, or the disappointing child or that savage tiger baby. But I guess I just am. She takes the seat next to me and Mr. Wong begins to talk a great deal about how I never seem to pay attention in class, and how my horrible grades reflect I am not working hard enough for my tests and exams. At some points I feel the urge to defend for myself, but ruthless words keep coming out of his mouth like thousands of bullets that bombard every single point of my body until I am too weak to even stand up and fight back. I take quick glimpses of Mum's reactions from time to time. To my surprise, she doesn't show much emotion on her face. No fierce stares.

No angry screams. No veins sticking out from the tip of her neck. It isn't until Mrs. Tam hand over a piece of paper to her does she begin to frown. I can vaguely recall Mrs. Tam mentioning some sort of brief diagnosis of my "situation", and a four-letter word keeps coming up in the middle of the conversation, probably an abbreviation with an A, and a D, and some other letters as well, but I can't really remember anymore.

On the way back home, Mum doesn't say a single word. I have got so used to her being so long-winded all the time that this unexpected silence scares me a bit. Her brows knit even tighter together in deep thoughts. I wish she could at least tell me how angry or sad she is right now.

When we pass by the swing set three blocks away from our house, I can't help but hop on as usual. After a few swings, I suddenly feel a push at my back. It is gentle, yet very powerful. I can feel the warmth of her palm that is sending me up to sky high, I reach out my left arm and it seems like the tip of my finger can almost touch the nearest cloud. I turn back and give Mum the most contented smile I have ever had on my face. I am not so sure about what is going on, but I bet it must be the power of the four-letter-word that is playing its little magic.

When Adam Bit the Apple

By Jeremy Julian Santiago

The velvet rope is lifted as I walk towards the bouncer and skip the line of impatient partygoers. They don't object, but I'm paid a look of annoyed understanding as a single red stamp is placed on my inner wrist and am motioned towards the elevator. Two men enter along with me. I don't stare at the ground as I usually do as to not invite interaction, because tonight I have my new outfit and my Giorgio Armani lipstick. However, something's different, one man turns his body towards me and the other man is leaning on the other side of the elevator with his hand resting on the handlebar, supporting his weight. The man facing me, with a slight slur and a flush on his face, says that I have beautiful curls. He lifts his hand, strokes my hair with a roughness that shows his unfamiliarity with my hair texture. This isn't a new experience. It's a familiar discomfort whenever I meet a stranger, I guess their urge is much like wanting to pet a fluffy dog. I am no dog, but I like to avoid the conflict of denying them, so I smile and giggle. Once my smile turns into a slight grin, his friend immediately interjects telling me that they're Norwegian businessmen, in town for a meeting and that it's his friend's birthday. I nod just long enough for the elevator doors to open on the 38th floor, thrown off as I didn't expect to run into any chasers in a straight bar.

I make my way to the bar and the bartender notices me quickly. I request a Cosmo to channel my inner Carrie Bradshaw. I get my drink, taking small sips, and wait around a bit when he asks me if there was a problem with the way he made it, I say no and reassure him that I'm just waiting for the check. He laughs and says it's free for me tonight. Happy that I don't have to pay the standard \$140 HKD for a mixed drink, I smile and say thank you. Now, with my drink in hand, I make my way to the dance floor and move my body to the house beats. I dance alone, with the strobe lights and bodies gyrating in sync to the DJ's mixes surrounding me. I finish my drink and now it's just me against the music.

I pull down the collar of my sweater to air out the sweat behind my neck built up from dancing among the humid cloud of people. I walk

with my heels commanding attention as I go to the bathroom; a series of single stalls, each individually marked male or female in an alternating progression. As I wait for a door to open, the security guard behind me monitoring the drunkenness of the club patrons, asks his partner "Is that a guy or a girl" in a volume just loud enough to be above the music; most people wouldn't hear it but I have grown to always be aware of the whispers that surrounded me to know when to get out. I didn't turn around, I didn't want to know the response. With my eyes fixed to the sticky black floor in front of me I could still feel their eyes fixated on my body. I place my legs closer together, I untuck the hair placed behind my ear, and cross my arms just beneath my chest. A door finally opens, staring at the ground I rush in and hide away in the stall and immediately my reflection is there to greet me,

"What gave me away?"

I stare at my hips

"Are they too square?"

I stare at my shoulders

"Are they too broad?"

My eyes trail higher and with urgency my eyes stop, there it is, a pointed peak taunting me under the overhead florescent lighting, my turtleneck, these six inches of extended fabric, has been lowered, no longer there to free me from analytical eyes. This isn't a new feeling, I'm used to being studied by lingering stares, but tonight is different. They have given me the validation I have sought out my entire existence, to be addressed as Miss, to be labeled she, and, unexpectedly, to be harassed by men. It was womanhood, and six inches of extended fabric was all that kept me from experiencing the good and bad of what it means to be a woman, only I was never raised as one, no mother to give warning of what lies ahead. There was no course on dealing with the world of men, the dangers of naivety, and that attention is a double-edged sword. What I have is only the expectations of eventually raising a family, marrying a good woman, and pointless years of basketball. My only inkling, to become the woman my parents expected me to marry, are all I have to draw from. I have always been different, but every Sunday I buried myself a little more each time until nothing showed

through. Yet here I am, bearing Eve's face, but still choking on Adam's apple.

I guess I should be grateful, that my ability to pass is so innate. All the other girls would love to throw on a turtleneck and that be the extent of their transition. But why do I hate myself right now? I guess it's my inexperience, thrust into womanhood in my 20s for this night but I'm standing here greeted with reality reflected before me. It didn't matter how gorgeous they thought I was before, all that matters is the same image I see staring back at me in the mirror—a man. I trail my eyes up, and stare at my face. My eyeliner, my blush, my eyeshadow, my lipstick, and my long curls: all this I taught myself, I put on myself, I did myself. My eyes trail back down. That peak is still reflecting in the mirror—but that's not who I am. I'm a woman, and no amount of makeup, hair, or people that question me can strip that away from me. I grab the paper towels right next to the bowl of condoms carrying the same black and purple coloring of the club logo and dry my neck, I refresh my war paint, swiping on a bloodied rouge at the center of my lower lip, meeting each corner of my mouth with the bullet and finally pressing my lips together.

I place my hand on the cold steel handle of the door, I push. Standing in the same location is the bouncer, eyeing me, head still slightly turned so that his mouth faced his colleague but eyes remaining on me. This time I can't hear what he says but his stare is the same. With each click of my heels I come closer to him with his eyes darting quickly away as I maintain eye contact. My eyes remain. I want him to experience the same discomfort, my eyes travel up and down his body with my head tilted upwards. I stand inches away. His eyes are now turned towards his colleague. I look at his face, his chest, and his crotch. I let out a small laugh with a slight grin, with my chin pointed upwards. He doesn't attempt to stare back. I've evoked the same gaze that has followed me throughout my entire life, and with a softened tone, I give a deep whisper saying,

“I'm whatever the hell the sign says on the bathroom door,”
and strut towards the dance floor.

Overdue Tax Benefits

By Gabrielle Tsui

I remember where I was, exactly one year ago, when the Supreme Court ruled gay marriage as a nationwide right: I was at my Uncle Wen's coffee shop, a place he had been running since 1995, and Uncle Wen was sitting with me at what I'd called my childhood corner during a quiet hour. Audrey had texted me within an hour, linking me to the news followed by a plethora of exclamation points. I had shown Uncle Wen, practically shoving my phone in his hands. The world had exploded in colour right there and then in my eyes. I didn't notice the myriad of emotions flitting across my Uncle Wen's eyes, the soft wistfulness in his rough-lined face as he handed the phone back to me, with its pictures of rainbow flags and men with salt-and-pepper hair kissing before a marriage registry. He said he was glad this day had come, though long overdue.

All my life, my dad has gone through several phases. As a kid, I was used to him inevitably emerging from the DIY section in bookstores with a beginner book on quilting or baking every time he accompanied me to pick up the new Judy Blume book. As a teenager, I'd come home from kickboxing classes to see a new pamphlet for pottery classes or a new easel erected in the living room.

Of all the phases he has gone through, the only ones that actually stuck were piano and knitting. The latter rather badly, but he enjoyed it enough to continue making scarves with wonky stitches for Uncle Wen and me every winter. The Steinway & Sons piano is still subject to occasional periods of neglect, followed by a morning when I'd wake up to the twanging sounds of my dad tuning it.

Oh, there's also Lucy. But Lucy was really a joint-impulse decision between my dad and I the winter before I left for university, so I'm not sure if she really counts.

"I needed to do something with all my time and energy, Minerva," he's saying to me now. His back is facing me as he stirs his mug of coffee. "You should see the trouble I got into in high school."

"Yes, yes, you've told me before."

Lucy plods into the kitchen, tail wagging as I set down her bowl of dry food next to her water bowl. I scratch her behind the ears for a bit before getting up to start my own breakfast.

"I remember you told me how you got into a fight with a bunch of kids in the neighbourhood because they called Uncle Wen a big ape."

"So I did." My dad chuckles, and he looks almost pleased with the memory. "You should go out soon if you're going to see Audrey today."

"Don't worry about it." I open the cabinet where all my snacks are, then stop. "How did you know?"

"That the kids called Uncle Wen a big ape?"

"No, that I'm going to see Audrey today."

I hear him slurp on his coffee. "You always go see Audrey on the weekends now."

"Dad!"

"What?"

I turn around and cross my arms. He just looks at me, holding his coffee and looking nonplussed. "If I was going to see Audrey, I would tell you."

"*Aiyah*. You hardly tell me anything, Minerva, so I used my brain."

The words are stern, but playfully so, and there is humour in the tone of his voice. It almost makes me want to laugh, but I don't – but I want to laugh, so I just make some kind of noise in response that I hope came out sounding agreeable, turning back to the kitchen counter to fill a bowl with oatmeal squares.

"How is Audrey doing anyway?" My dad continues, his voice carrying over from the dining room as he walks out of the kitchen. "Her mother still setting her up with new boyfriends?"

The oatmeal squares come tumbling out of the box harder than expected and I scoop them up off the counter surface before they go skidding off onto the floor. "No—er, not now. Why do you ask?"

There's no answer, somewhat unsurprisingly, and I open the fridge for the carton of milk. Lucy looks up from her bowl and, after sniffing my toes, follows my dad out of the kitchen.

He makes it sound like he had a lot of “time and energy” to pick up all those odd hobbies back then, but he really didn’t. Energy, maybe, but he didn’t really have a load of time in between hospital shifts and raising a temperamental child like me. And yet, I’d still stumble over a new box of acrylics when going into my dad’s study so that he could sign my report card, or I’d come downstairs in the middle of the night for a drink of water only to find him listlessly setting up a model train.

It’s been a little less than half a year and I don’t think he’s gone through another “phase”. He has dropped jogging in the mornings, but that’s only on account of his accident and has settled for long walks with Lucy. I don’t think he took it that well when his hip injury started hindering activities he had always reveled in, but he would never voice those sentiments out loud to me, only joking about how the mid-twenties joggers must enjoy their mornings now that they’re not being constantly overtaken by a Chinese man in his fifties.

When I was younger, I’d asked my dad a million questions about my mother: what she was like, whether I looked like her, where was she now, how did they meet, and why she left. And my dad, always so generous with his smiles and words, would only ever give short answers, or nothing at all.

After a while, I learned to stop asking so many questions about her. Not only because I never actually got any answers, but also - and perhaps mainly, because she was never a huge part of my life anyway. I had long forgotten her by the time I learned how to say baba, and as far as I knew she never reached out to me, so it wasn’t hard for me to forget her again as I grew up.

My school counselor in junior high once suggested that the reason for my dad’s “phases” was because my mother left him.

“Like a coping mechanism, when one feels lost.” She had said with a smile. “It’s quite natural. You mustn’t let your parents’ relationship bother you.”

God, my school counselor was full of crap.

Except I didn’t think that at the time, not exactly. I just didn’t like the way she smiled - smiling with her mouth and only her mouth, and that

she was making assumptions about my dad’s emotions, let alone mine. Of course, she wouldn’t have known my dad only really picked up piano because he’d always join me on the bench to practice in the early days when I still took piano classes and was able to coax more life out of the keys in one hour than I could ever have done if I had continued taking piano classes for the rest of my life.

I think I stewed over this conversation more than I would’ve admitted it at the time. I went to kickboxing class after school and was probably a lot more aggressive than usual because I distinctly remember my coach barking at me to “walk it off”. I didn’t even tell my dad, not when I got home, not during dinner, until we were doing the dishes and my dad finally asked me if I had met with the counselor that day.

I wasn’t sure he had heard me when I told him. I remember the soap suds dripping off his knuckles and into the sink with dull, hollow plops. Then he exhaled, shaking his head as he turned on the tap and rinsed his hands under the running water.

“These counselors! I’ve been picking up random hobbies since I was a young boy. It has nothing to do with your mother.” He said, wiping his hands with a towel, and smiled at me.

I believed him wholeheartedly - except I didn’t quite realize it at the time. I just knew that he was smiling at me, and so I relaxed and washed my hands as well. “And not because you feel lost?”

“Everyone feels lost sometimes, Minerva, and your baba is no exception.” My dad paused, running the towel over his hands again even though they were dry. “But when I do, it’s not because of your mother. You can be sure of that.”

“Okay,” I said. I believed him, and yet I remember being dissatisfied with his answer. There were so many things I still wanted to know, but I could tell he didn’t want to delve into it much further, so I ended up asking: “What kind of hobbies did you pick up when you were my age?”

He didn’t answer for a beat or two, but I saw him softened as he thought about my question, perhaps searching through fond memories. He put away the towel and started to tell me about the animals and lotus flowers he’d fold from scraps of paper when he was my age, because his father, my yeye, had

bought him a beginner's guide on origami.

He mentioned the stint at parkour, and the time he decided he wanted to collect stamps but remembered he needed to receive letters to do so; he talked about how Uncle Wen managed to stop a small fire in my dad's bedroom from some failed childish experiment and the cactus my dad over-watered in preparation for Uncle Wen's birthday gift.

At some point we had sat back down at the dinner table, me fixing mugs of tea midway for the both of us, and by the time my dad exclaimed about how late it had gotten, I had put away all thoughts of my mother, of the school counselor. I would go to bed that night, picturing my dad presenting a wilted cactus to Uncle Wen when they were fourteen years old.

An hour later, I leave my dad with his coffee and Lucy in front of a Charlie Rose documentary I have saved for him last night and go to find Audrey at the bookstore where she'd been working weekend shifts.

She likes hearing about my dad. Her mother has been divorced twice and is going through a third one right now, so Audrey genuinely enjoys hearing about the comparably lighthearted stories I have from home. I tell her about my dad's questions about Audrey's mother and she snorts in amusement, deftly inserting newly printed labels for the bookshelves into little plastic cases.

I first met Audrey during orientation in my first year of, two awkward people gravitating towards each other and eventually becoming friends. She got me into musical theatre, and I rambled to her about Oscar Wilde; I went with her to a support group for "troubled young adults" her mother was forcing her to go, and she took me to my first pride parade; we'd sat with each other through the night as we crammed in our final paper and she was there when I fell sick whilst living away from home; she dated a girl from my American literature class on-and-off and I brought her ice cream after their messy break-up over one summer.

We didn't start dating until five months ago, at the start of our fourth year of university. "Kind of like some kind of slow burn story about longtime friends finally coming to terms with their feelings for each other," Audrey said two days into our relationship. "Long overdue."

Audrey doesn't mind the fact that I've been dragging my heels in telling my dad about our relationship, but she stipulates firmly that I should at the very least tell him that I'm gay.

"What's the worse he can do? I definitely don't think Uncle Joseph is the 'pray away the gay' kind of parent." She's right; she knew how that was like because her mom is like that.

Audrey pulls out a stack of young adult books from under the counter as the door rings with a couple of customers filing into the bookstore. I smile distractedly at them, edging sideways on the counter so I don't look like someone hogging the cashier, and think for a while as Audrey sorts through the books and greets the customers.

I don't know if it's because my dad has never pressured me about relationships, that him being a single dad whose wife left him in the early years has resulted in him being a parent who never hovered over his daughter about finding a good boyfriend or potential husband, but telling him that I am gay seems like a non-issue. And by the time I understood that I don't like boys, and I like girls, and this was a pretty big deal that still needed to be talked about, I was at university and not living at home. I didn't tell my dad the first time I visited home afterwards, and after that, it just felt like a deadline I kept evading.

"Minnie Wong," Audrey says once the customers have wandered away from earshot, interrupting my thoughts. "Your dad is the only parent out of all my girlfriends' families that didn't look at my afro like it was something distasteful. That's a *good* thing."

"I guess I'm used to my dad and I not talking about certain things."

"That's not a good thing. I also think," Audrey paused in the middle of tagging a copy of *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. "He probably already knows."

"No, he doesn't. I haven't told him."

"Well I know that, but parents like Uncle Joseph just know things, you know? And I bet there are things *you* don't know about *him*." I pull a face and Audrey hits my shoulder with *Aristotle and Dante*. "Not like that! I mean, something more emotional."

Maybe it was a bit like the "phases": though I often wondered why

they happened, I never asked it out loud, and he never offered to explain – not concisely anyway. Sometimes I think he doesn't know the reasons himself. My dad is undoubtedly openhearted and outgoing, and yet – when I think about it – I can't always imagine what might be on his mind sometimes. As if I couldn't reiterate it enough, he is a single dad whose wife left him with their infant baby and, if his silences are in any way telling, a baggage of unhappy memories better left untouched.

Once, when I came home crying after a bunch of boys at the playground kept taunting me about how I didn't have a mother, my dad put on that really old movie of *The Muppets* where Kermit the Frog sang "Rainbow Connection", and spun me around the living room until we collapsed into a heap of dizzy laughter. The baggage is there, but he keeps it to himself. The only pictures he had on the desk in his study is a picture of me when I was small, and a really old, faded one of my dad and Uncle Wen as teenagers, holding the wilted cactus between them, an arm over each other, and grinning broadly at the camera.

That actually does give me a thought. "Sometimes I think I'm waiting for him to tell me something."

"Tell you what?"

I look at her in the eye. "Something emotional."

"Ha-ha, very funny. *Minnie*," the sorted books are pushed to the end of the counter for more space. "Chances are he's also waiting for you. The endless cycle of non-communication, nobody wins."

"What do you want me to do?"

Audrey just looks at me.

"Just talk to your dad." She reaches over to tuck a strand of hair back over my ear – there, just so. "That's what I want you to do."

I've known Uncle Wen since I was small. Back then; when my dad was still working irregular tight shifts at the hospital, Uncle Wen would be there to pick me up from my primary school if my dad couldn't make it. He would take me to his coffee shop, letting me sit in the corner seat to work on my homework with a plate of chocolate chip cookies. If it was a busy hour, he would take over work at the counter so that he could at least keep an eye

on me; if not, he would sit with me and help me with my multiplication tables until my dad showed up.

Like my dad, Uncle Wen had immigrated to America as a young boy with his family. Unlike my dad, Uncle Wen's family were not all that fortunate financially at first, working minimum wage jobs in the first couple of decades before being able to get better jobs and finally stop pinching as many pennies. Like my dad, Uncle Wen is a divorcee, but unlike my dad, Uncle Wen parted amicably with his ex-wife after a year of marriage and has no children. They couldn't have been more different, my dad and Uncle Wen.

Uncle Wen is a big broad-shouldered man with a gruff-looking face, the kind that had my classmates asking me if he was in some kind of gang the first few times they saw him. My dad is lean, pretty lanky, and has a face that is creased with laughter lines. Uncle Wen is rough edges and concrete, whereas my dad is what my nainai called wind and whimsy.

Perhaps it was why they fit with each other so well in each other's lives; perhaps they found each other like puzzle pieces finding their right fit. As far as little old me was concerned, Uncle Wen is like a second dad of sorts, and deeply intertwined with my family – intertwined in a way that he's naturally mentioned during conversations because an event in my life simply can't be explained without explaining Uncle Wen.

I know I don't have a mother, who's a little more than a mythical figure in my mind, but I do have Uncle Wen: it was Uncle Wen who helped me memorize my nine- and twelve-times-table, Uncle Wen at my sixteenth birthday party with my dad and grandparents and classmates and a cake he baked himself, and Uncle Wen who had called me one mid-April evening just when I was buckling down for my Medieval poetry paper to tell me about my dad's hip injury.

Three days after that phone call; two days after I had made the long drive from university to check on my dad in an admittedly frenzied panic and help him get discharged, I sat at the dinner table at home with my dad while Uncle Wen was in the kitchen making us dinner.

"Minerva," My dad had said. "Don't you have a lot of deadlines this week?"

“Only two. It’s okay, I’m working on them.”

“I’m sure you are. You should go back to your university tomorrow so that you can focus.”

“It’s okay, dad. I can work on my laptop here.”

“No, no, it’ll be too distracting here—”

Before I could say anything, Uncle Wen had called out from the kitchen, “Don’t be such a fussy old man, Joseph. Minerva can decide for herself.”

My dad frowned, wrinkling his nose slightly, and I didn’t know whether to laugh or change the subject. Before I could decide, my dad was shaking his head at me, “I may be old, but I’m not so fussy.”

“You’re also not that old, baba,” I said consolingly and was rewarded with a slight twinkle in his eyes.

“Your Uncle Wen, on the other hand, has nothing better to do except to check on me every other week to lecture me about how messy the house is like some kind of fussy housewife.”

I sat up. “Uncle Wen, dad called you a fussy housewife!”

“Tell your dad to shut up!”

I stifled a giggle and was glad to see my dad relaxing considerably, not furrowing his brows over my deadlines. I was glad too, at that moment, for Uncle Wen and how he must’ve kept my dad company while I was away at university; my uncomplaining, wind and whimsy dad who would get himself injured and in the same breath tells me to focus on school first.

And I did so like seeing them together.

I come home mid-afternoon. Lucy comes to greet me as I’m taking off my shoes, sticking her nose at my hand for some welcome-home petting. I hear piano music coming from the living room, and I recognize the occasional out of tune *twang* of a key from the Steinway & Sons piano.

I don’t say anything, making my way to the living room. I recognize the tune as something from Beethoven, but only because it’s one of the only things my dad really knows how to play when he cranks up the piano. My dad is, as expected, seated at on the piano bench, playing like he was just comfortable that he could put the piano to use in one way or another.

Lucy walks past me and settles on the floor underneath the piano, and I feel a rush of fondness for my dad. Beethoven and every other piano player would probably turn in their graves upon hearing my dad play, but the strands of music are very much characteristic of my dad - light and a little nonsensical sounding, content at its own pace. *Wind and whimsy*.

I sit down on the bench beside him and he shifts a bit to make space for me, the tune only jarring slightly as he moves but continuing nonetheless. I notice, not for the first time, that his hands are slightly more veined, a little bonier, the same way there have been more lines on his face lately, his hair turning thinner and grayer. As I take these details in I’m filled with a sudden sense of resolve I have been inexplicably carrying with me since I left my talk with Audrey earlier.

“Did you tune the piano before you play? It sounds a bit off.”

“Of course I did. It’s not my first time using this piano.”

“Last time you left the piano untouched for a month. It’s only been a week since you played it, what gives?”

This elicits a chuckle from my dad, and he stops playing. “Didn’t I tell you this morning? I need something to do with all this time and energy.”

Normally, I would respond with some kind of quip, like you mean like you *were bored?* But I don’t, instead, I try to fit the resolve somewhere in words. I think about my dad’s generosity with words and his easiness at talking, how he’d fill silences and tell me stories of his silly hobbies when I was unhappy; how, despite all that, there were things he still could never quite tell me, like an endless cycle of indirect communication, as Audrey put it.

Before I can say anything though, I hear my dad sigh beside me. “Minerva, there’s something I must tell you.”

“What?”

“About your mother—”

“About my mom?” I interrupt without thinking, but I’m caught off guard. Of all the things I have been thinking about today, my mythic mother is far from my main concerns. I wonder wildly in the back of my head if my mother is waiting somewhere in the house at this very moment.

My dad pats the hand I have fisted in my lap as if to calm me down.

“Yes, your mother. About why she left me—us.”

“Oh.”

“She left because I didn’t love her.” He shakes his head. “No, I did love her, I know I think I did. But I didn’t love her the way she wanted to be loved when she married me. We fought a lot, even before you were born. Those were the nineties, you know, when people rarely talked about different kinds of love between different people. Even I didn’t really understand.”

I was about to say that that’s *perfectly* normal, that I understood he and my mother had married young and naturally wouldn’t have understood the gravity of it until perhaps later, but the words stop right on the tip of my tongue, just as I’m opening my mouth to say them.

Oh.

Oh.

“Dad—“

“And it took me a long time to finally understand,” He continues, and I close my gaping mouth, wrapping my head around what he’s really trying to say. “It wasn’t until I saw you and Audrey—“

I splutter. “*Me and Audrey?* Dad, she and I—we’re—“

He looks at me, shocked and even a little offended that I’m so surprised. “Minerva, I raised you. Don’t you think *baba* couldn’t tell that you liked a girl? I told you, I used my brain.”

The gumption I’ve been building up leaves my body like one big gusty sigh – that is to say, I can feel myself deflating with something that feels like relief. It’s a little silly, but a part of me wants to tell Audrey this immediately, to make her laugh and squeal “I told you so!” Another part of me wants to laugh hysterically, because I’m suddenly thinking of that school counselor again, that she may have been wrong that my dad’s so-called “phases” were meant to be coping strategies from my mother ditching him, but she definitely had some semblance of the right idea that all his hobbies and shenanigans were him trying to find a footing in the world, trying to understand that part of him he couldn’t fit into a box.

“You know, dad,” I plant an elbow on the piano keys – producing a singular mishmash of notes – and press my forehead against my knuckles.

“I was just thinking about this today.”

I look at my dad and his eyes are twinkling, a lightness in his smile that I had never really seen before. He’s still smiling—rather, I don’t think he can stop smiling when he suddenly stands up, Lucy immediately sliding out from under the piano as she follows him. “Let’s go, Minerva.”

“Where to?”

I trail after Lucy trailing after my dad, and I watch as he pulls out his shoes by the front door. “To find your Uncle Wen. And while we’re in the car I want you to tell me all about you and Audrey.”

I nearly trip over Lucy as I rush to join him at the door. “Wait, dad, are you *sure?*”

“About you and Audrey?”

I want to laugh but I don’t—instead, I just focus on shoving my feet back into my shoes, my dad waiting patiently. I’m suddenly remembering Uncle Wen’s face the hour when the Supreme Court ruled gay marriage as a nationwide right, I’m thinking about his ever-constant presence in my life besides my dad, I’m going back to the times I’ve overheard them bicker like an old married couple, I’m wondering about all the things that were left unsaid and just how long overdue this all is.

“Of course I’m sure,” my *baba* says, and I follow him out the door.

Poetry

Learning to Love Hong Kong

by CHAN Seen Man

Eyes learning to love hands
Hands that stretch out in greeting
Hands tapping their octopus cards

Wrinkled wrists with a jade bracelet
Wrists pouring milk tea
Playing chess and tennis

Eyes learning to love arms
Arms that built buildings from bricks
Arms carrying protest banners and umbrellas

Eyes learning to love faces
Faces young yet strong
Faces old and grey

Behind each person there's a story
There's a song
There's a poem

Eyes learning to love legs
Legs walking from Prince Edward to TST
Breaking in new shoes

Eyes learning to love feet
Feet sore, weary, and ready
Feet moving at infinite speed

Eyes learning to love hearts
Hearts beating in subdivided flats
Hearts needing shopping malls

Hearts knowing after fifty years
Hearts knowing China
Eyes learning to love Hong Kong.

His Eyes

by CHAN Yan Kei

He has the eyes
like the most precious of stones.
The ones that
we dive for in the ocean
we dig for in the desert
we pick for in the forest.

They are
every shade of blue and green
polished and worn in fine jewellery
shining like the Venus
the brightest star in the sky.

I used to believe his eyes are glacier,
ice cold, no warmth and never shared loved.
That's what I used to believe.
Now I know,
there are hottest fires that always burn blue.

New Release: EMERGENCY

by CHAU Lai Yee, Renee

green protest raises angry bomb
freed now
Real roar MUST BE blind
Anger lost in translation
babies grow hit kill
The fine art of corruption BLOOMS, market Reborn
Cinemas CLOSE
sorry
LET'S GO back to life

This is a Photograph of Me

by CHAU Lai Yee, Renee

Taking bus 263,
I looked out the windowpane
with my face printed on
Ma Wan Channel.
So my face passes by
the lights,
the lights,
the lights,
and slowly floats by Rhone.
The starlight curls my shadow
and my body blooms in patches,
waving like a yellow dragon,
an animal lost at night.
Its ups and downs are in clots,
trembling with the water.
Until the wind hums an international lullaby,
shivering like straws in flame.
Let it dance,
Let my face dance out the flame
Until they are said to be ashes,
until the bus goes lame.

Spring

by CHUI Chloe

Of all the buds she once nurtured,
the myrtle yet to brown with ivy not yet sere.
Inept as she comes to pluck the petals,
razing her garden before the savouring year.

For Cassandra was once again ignored,
her warnings dismissed
at the snort of a young girl.

Oh stupid girl,
the absurd collection of dried buds she compels,
regrets,
impels herself to yearn for remedy.

Little does she know,
Spring is a thief
disguised as flowering trees.
The blossoms –
Not the same buds this year as last
Nor are those she replants.

In Memory of Grandma

by HO, Rachael Boaz Man-Ching

Mother of seven, wife of none,
To me you are the strongest one;
The beast named cancer waged a war,
But after three you still stood tall.
You tell me all your story tales
Of how we always try and fail.
You smile against the ups and downs,
In life you smile and never frown.
Remember when the night you fell,
You smiled to us and bid farewell.
I'll remember your last words to me:
"Don't lose hope son, that is the key."

The Road

by HO, Rachael Boaz Man-Ching

Lost in decay, where do I go,
In boundless paths of ash and snow.
My only friend concedes defeat,
And gallops away before a shriek.

I walk the road of ruins alone,
My hopeless heart is carved of stone.
Between the withered trees of woe,
Who is my friend, who is my foe?

My legs are weak, my soul appeased,
With hundred promises deceased.
Apocalypse is not the end,
I'm just lost, I can't defend.

"Set me free, bring me to death"
I snivel with my final breath;
If I die before I wake,
I pray the Lord, my soul to take.

The Hong Kong Clock

by KWONG Wai Kit

What is the Hong Kong clock composed of?
Probably gears of conflicts.
Yellow and blue have become the call number for everyone in society.
The ice block of anxiety is dissolving in the hot chocolate jasmine tea.
What is the correct time?
究竟何時

What is the Hong Kong clock composed of?
Nothing but a lack of lubricant.
Policy speeches keep pushing people into the crowded clinics.
The true victory stumbles because of the traffic jam.
Who can be the one to fix it?
人手短缺

Adults should be the nose and should give wise words
but some stumble because of the stone called greed
利益輸送

What was the Hong Kong clock composed of?
柔和色彩

I do not want to open the window...

by KWONG Wai Kit

I do not want to open the window
because I am tired.

A minute ago, I saw Brad Pitt in the movie screening the Second World War
I thought he enjoyed the cruel reality.

Tam is robbing in the kindergarten.
I am a prey and he is a predator.

There is no more Full Metal Jacket – Soldiers conquer others by love.

Actually, I do want to try –
I'll open the window.

I want to smell the breeze, and
I would like to blow bubbles out from the plastic tube in a playground.

Frank is looking at me out there.
Cover of 'Lose Yourself' by some rapper is on the radio.

A stands for art, B for beauty and C, of course, is candy.

I guess I will grow up fast tomorrow.

I am a broken chair because I am going to be fixed.

Aging tastes like a rotten apple and sounds like cocaine.

The window is reflecting the dim light of sunset.

If he is threatening me, then I will kneel.

This morning, I strolled, and this evening, I will run.

Inspector of a murder case tells me it is reality.

Reflection on the glass must grow taller.

Him

by LAI Sum Yee (Aqua)

(Inspired by Simon Armitage's "Not the Furniture Game")

His hair was fresh cut grass on a football field
 and his eyes were pebbles in penguin's world
 and his blink was the start of a waterfall
 and his teeth were tiles made from porcelain
 and his bite was her own branding.
 His nostrils were a five year-old
 and his lips were a wool blanket
 and his last smile was a picture day
 and his tongue was a movie trailer
 and his whistle was a baby's first walk
 and his laugh was burnt marshmallow.
 He coughed, and it was chamomile tea
 and his headaches were false dichotomies
 and his arguments were corners of tables
 and his neck was chromium
 and his Adam's apple was silk in shop
 and his arms were replaced by pillows.
 His elbows were knees
 and his wrists were riverbends
 and his handshake was pigs in a blanket
 and his fingers were soldiers who survived battles
 and the palm of his hands were children doodles
 and both thumbs were the yellow poles on buses.
 And his shadow was those playful mirrors one could see in Toys 'R' Us
 and his dog was the image of an angel which would never fade
 and his heart was made by an ambitious drummer
 and his shoulder-blades were road signs
 and his belly-button was the golden reading light
 and his private part was ketogenic diet during winter
 and his backside was a hardcopy of the guinness world record
 and his stretch marks were rivers of China.
 The whole system of his blood was a treasure map
 And his legs were water currents

and his knees were yoga instructors
 and his ligaments were wooden chopsticks at Chinese restaurants
 and his calves were blue whales searching for food
 The toes of his feet were green peas that children hate
 and his footprints were the pile of autumn leaves on the road side
 and his promises were coffee at dinner
 and his grin was the knife stabbed in her heart
 and the last time they talked, it was mainly silence.

A Haiku on Poetry

by LAI Sum Yee (Aqua)

Hot iron, tongue tearer,
Thumbscrew, process of writing,
They all feel the same

Heartbeat

by LAM Ching Cho, Allison

The clock is ticking
He looked to his side
It is still empty

He remembered they used to run high and low in the neighbourhood park
Sunshine, laughter.
Those were the days.

He remembered he held his tiny little hands
Walked side by side to the gate
Waving goodbye
Those were the days.

He remembered he stood and clapped for his first drama
He smiled and waved back
Immersed in pride
Those were the days.

He remembered his tears
His laughter
His frowns
Those were the days.

The black and the white stood at his bedside,
: Let's go.
: Just a bit more time would do.
He reached his trembling hands to the side
Grasping nothing but air.
: Time's up.

Solitude

by LEE Terrence Charkey

At this empty rainy night
My sorrow drizzles like the rain

I cannot help but go inside
Embarking into whole new land
I see this solitary building
Lighting alone tonight

The place is quiet
So is my heart.
Cannot say a single word
Let the rain drop by
Let the tears wash my heart.

Mongkok Keywords

by LEUNG Tsoi Hang Stephanie

If you don't understand
why I 講呢啲
I will now recap in English:

We go late night 鳩鳴
until we see doves
foraging for food through the morning streets

Jesus and Guandi are good brothers here
義氣 over cash isn't just for the cinema
We are realists, but
we know the black and white
amidst neon and LED signs

The old love hotels are still here
despite the rising rent (that still rises
despite the evil Occupy Central)
There were light, laughter,
and HEHE liaisons, unofficially licensed

Someone asks the reception woman, have Jesus and Guandi
been here? You 厚多士, giggles the woman,
let's have breakfast together, condensed milk and jam on toast
spilling as you cut it open...

We don't carry knives on Nathan Road
But we can flashmob dance to 榴槤乜乜乜
battling all the 大妈
(I will not recap in Putonghua, do you understand?)
Jesus and Guandi watch along, singing the body electric

Blooming Umbrellas

(Inspired by Nate Pritt's "Endless Summer")

by LEUNG Tsoi Hang Stephanie

a man breaks into the main road people break through barriers
 i want universal suffrage
 tear gas! i want universal suffrage i want freedom more
 tear gas blooming umbrellas
 more tear gas pepperspray sucks d7689 injuries will they open
 fire more umbrellas blooming

....

blooming class boycott camping on the main road
 i want universal suffrage d7689
 will they clear us away? civil disobedience we just want
 democracy umbrellas blooming
 everywhere people breaking through barriers pepperspray
 again will they open fire freedom everywhere
 unfriended we talked outside a tent will they clear us away

...

tents on the main road lennon wall i want universal suffrage
 blooming umbrellas
 people break through people want democracy will they open
 fire? black police
 batons and sprays bleeding are we blooming or withering
 we will not back down
 i want freedom not tear gas don't open fire don't unfriend
 we can talk
 i'm in tamar new village umbrellas blooming through the night
 people deserve democracy

....

we deserve universal suffrage not batons many injuries will
 they eventually open fire
 chalk drawings blooming on the road you may say i'm a
 dreamer are we withering
 how will they clear us away tear gas? we have an
 umbrella army still blooming
 we will not back down fuck the police more injuries still
 boycotting class
 dreamers cold even inside the tent someone gives me a bowl of
 hot soup peppersprayed

...

universal suffrage i want blooming chalk drawings washed
 away d7689
 but we have love we kiss outside the tent we do
 homework on harcourt road
 why are there batons why are there injuries where is home
 all we have is love
 everything is free and peaceful in villa hamitage under
 blooming umbrellas
 will they open fire eventually do they really want to talk
 lingering lingering withering

...

they clear us away goodbye lennon wall goodbye villagers they
 break into the main road
 they remove the barriers they remove everything we just want
 democracy universal suffrage
 where is home? unfriended tear gas dark corners
 they will eventually open fire
 i can't breathe am i withering don't unfriend me please i still
 love you blooming

Goodbye to Hong Kong

by LI Ka Yan Catherine

Walk through the crowd
A glass of champagne
A live jazz band
A man in suit
Awaits.
He sees them as temptations;
I see them as opportunities.

A silent note in darkness
A string of the flying balloon
Wakes me.
He hears them as lousy melodies;
I see them as roses
Among the thorns.

Let the crows be left behind
Let them fly away.
Among the neon lights,
The packed street signs,
My dream is perhaps too small
To fit in this glamorous city.

Learning to Love Hong Kong

by LI Ka Yan Catherine

because it has the most extraordinary skyline.

because the Victoria Harbour calms the night view
because star ferries gently sail
and because of islands situated in between.

because you see mountains rather than the tallest buildings.

because I am walking on HK Island
I take old fashioned trams
as well as that tram ding ding to the stunning Peak

because I have seen banners on top of the Lion Rock
because there exists the spirit of fellow Hong Kongers
because I have heard people shouting in yellow umbrellas in Admiralty
because in unity we have sung.

But I see the brightest lights in a bigger city.
I hear the loudest Broadway and jazz music
it calls me.

Because I once matched the rhythm of the crowd
but my footsteps go faster than the people
because of my desire to see beyond the population.

because I have loved this lovely city
but also because our spirit is to never give up
I have to move on.

Because I have loved here
I shall return.

I do not want to be bored

by Soline Nadia Caiazza

This morning I saw an airplane crash on TV
And I thought I could have been in this plane.
This morning I was tired
And this evening, I will go to bed too late.
I do not want to be bored.

Carine has danced like a queen in LKF.
He will eventually study in Paris.
Nikus is probably sleeping on the shared-apartment sofa.
Godot has forgotten to put on trousers.
And I am a bed, because I accept everybody.

The tree is bending.
The window is running away.
I am a Ferrari and he is a tractor.
And I want to tell you that unfortunately
the flowers of my kimono are pink not red.

If my roommate is looking for her key, I will give her mine.
A stands for Always, B stands for Best, and C of course, is Choice.
Coming home makes your day begin again.
So he is more like a bike.
And I have two other kimonos, you know, but those are for judo.

Sunny Side Up

by WANG Yo Martin

The Hour hand cracks a pastel shell,
over-easy,
on the horizon swell.
Minute waits as Summer seasons:
salt, pepper,
citrus (just a squeeze in).
The Second hand, eager, poised to poke,
leaves spongy clouds soaked
in molten yolk.
Far and wide, Early Birds call:
“Breakfast is ready,
made hot for all!”

Watching Bojack Horseman

by TSANG Cheuk Yan Jolie

Cat and dog, human and horse, rabbit and owl,
party animals horsing around like
they don't care
Suck the sorrow down with booze
Get rid of yourself with a smoke of cigarette
And never look at the mirror and see
How you loathe yourself
Just do bad things and feel
Bad
Then hide, hide from all others
From what you dream at night and what you see on TV screen,
Heartbeat and what you see in mirrors.

I found it sophisticated when one of them says:
"I'm responsible for my own happiness?
I can't even be responsible for my own breakfast!" And another says:
"When you look at someone through rose-colored glasses,
all the red flags just look like flags"
Broken needles, shattered candyfloss, piercing murmurings
I picked them up, smiled and remorseful
And then I remembered someone had once said
I hate the sight of blood, but it's in my veins.

Plain Prinia

by WANG Yo Martin

A sultry swirl prompts the rain,
doodles down, cut by crisp refrain:
Plain Prinia.
A product of the Prophet's father,
drunk on synesthesia.
Who carved you out of willow wood,
with contours cast a carpenter could.
On the workbench (miles wide) lays a brush,
dipped in green that birthed all lush.
Across the space an empty chalice,
towers over the platonic palette.
Warring red and lemon yellow,
a few hues down, a sunset meadow.
Shying purple and bursting blue,
every colour— plus a few.
With Saturday weary and nearly through,
He lays on a cloud and
forgets to paint you.

An Inept Apology

by WONG Chin Ying

The birds, they sing of dawn's approaching light.
The clock's two hands will never cease the chase.
I wait in vain for change to fill my sight;
Each day the same events at heaven's pace.

Sweet time bypasses, leaves a bitter taste,
Turns frost to leaves and fruitful trees to snow.
You can endure but I must make in haste;
To linger takes more strength than I could know.

If I could ask the moon to stay behind
And tell the sun that it could never rise,
Your words, your mind, they still would not align,
Your fearlessness no longer a disguise.

The days and months soon bloom into a year.
I can no longer wait for you, my dear.

Half a Moon

by WONG Chun Hong

Breeze
Here I cease
after a long ride
along the harbour side

Looking up I see the moon
not as round as people assume
just as the day calls for a reunion
but not everyone has a companion
Alone I spend the night through
and whisper, how are you?

By the harbour side
without a guide
I take a ride
and bide

This will also be the past

by ZHOU Fanghang

I know you are reading this poem
Late, before closing your eyes
Searching for a heart that echoes yours
I know you are reading this poem
When you feel lonely but don't want to talk
Words become the best medicine for you
I know you are reading this poem
To your sweetheart, to your family
Saying how many times it comforted you
I know you are reading this poem
When you succeed in winning a competition
When you feel satisfied of yourself
When everyone comes to congratulate you
I know you are reading this poem
During the afternoon tea time
Against the wall and sunshine
Listening to your favorite song
I know you are reading this poem
When you are old and cannot walk
Full of memories and glories
Though it has long been remembered in the heart
I know you are reading this poem
Not because how long it is

But for every time when you read
You will be refreshed
This
will also be the past

Death is a festival to come

by ZHOU Fanghang

A story doesn't begin with once upon a time
A ghost forgot to drink Meng Po Soup
The sun rises from the west
Water has its shape

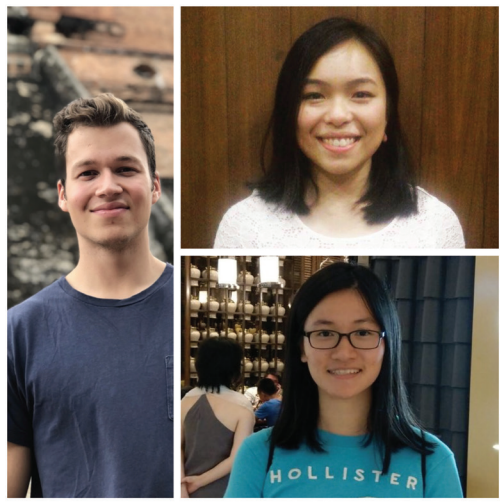
Shelter for all creatures—the world
A passer-by of thousand generations—the time
Don't think twice before you do anything
Death is a festival to come

'Being as It Is'. (如是存在)

Tao Hoi Chuen

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





Short Story Editors

Left: Christian McGrew

Top-right: Lorraine Yu

Bottom-right: Michelle Wong



Poetry Editors

From left to right:

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