

CU Writing in English

Volume IX/2009

Preface

(Story Section)

We need stories. It is a cliché to say that stories happen around us every minute. But the sad fact is, as metropolitans shut themselves with earplugs and mobile phones on MTR — a minute space sharing the breaths of many, they grow unaware of some every day dramas in the tunnel of self-possession.

Still, we need stories. And in the very similar manner of having modern food, we buy them instantly. As we walk past a convenient store, magazine covers with bizarre titles invite us into tragedies, scandals and gossips. Just a little presentation skill and the daily drama becomes thrilling stories capturing the darkness in human nature behind glamorous smiling faces. Those unusual tales begin to sound more familiar than the daily triviality people encounter. However, as we very often shut ourselves from the reality, how much do we truly know about these protagonists and the stories behind them?

And how much do we truly know about ourselves?

It does not take a genius or a scholar to write short stories. Because the truth is, everybody can be writers and everything can be the plot. Anyone can scratch around a computer to sketch a mental picture of daily routines. And it does not matter if they are too common because life is not gossips. Our life is about the most organic memories and the most trivial.

Indeed, storytellers use the same and rich resources to brew cauldrons of stories — real or surreal but, nevertheless, true. When gossips take snaps of the most explosive news, short stories give novelty to the ‘olds’. The difference rests upon the pair of generous eyes and ears good storytellers own. They open them to the whole

picture of incidents and taste the trivial and mundane like pearls of ever young grapes. Have you ever realized anything so interesting about taking a lift? What is the taste of an afterlife? What is the story of a mahjong table? In ten pages or so, a short story experiences life to its fullest.

This year, the CU writing selection brings in fifteen creative stories with local flavor — the unique psychology of different kinds of Hong Kongers and sparkles of surrealism — the more fascinating human psychology in general. Now, hold on to a thread of the enigmatic human nature and set out to explore the individualistic and kaleidoscopic human mind through the selection!

Alice Chui
Flora Mak
Yolanda So

Preface

(Poetry Section)

The poems this year are of high quality. We CU students certainly possess a diversity of voices.

For example, we have conversations with our fellow Hong Kongers, and with Li Bai. We spend pensive moments staring at a clock, and dancing with a bee. We tell stories of different occupations. We pay tribute to objects like fish tanks, guitars. We salute time. We juggle with rhymes and rhythms, forms and phrases, words and foreign languages.

The variations have impressed us. Our job is to present them in such a way that they impress our readers as well. This explains why you will find the organization different.

Upon completion of the editing work, we would like to thank the English Department of CUHK for their support and hard work. But for their help, we would never be able to bring in these pioneering changes.

Cecilia Chan
Pierre Lien
Michael Tsang

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Story



Dedicated to
Professor Parker
who inspires us to perspire in writing

Out of Eden

by Gabriel Wong Ka Ho

The girl replaced the yellow shirt she had sold yesterday with a new yellow shirt. She arranged the shirts on this shelf according to the colours of the rainbow: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Violet. Multi-coloured on the sides. Piles of five, small size on top, large at the bottom. She was contented to see the spectrum of light restored. It had to have been how God felt after he created Eden - of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind. She named her boutique Eden. The girl then went back behind the counter, waiting for the first customer to come. She had a pack of Skittles with her. She popped a red one, then a green one. There came another green piece. She put it back into the candy packet, got a yellow one. She could not stand having two of the same colour in a row. It was always good to keep things in the order that they were supposed to be.

The girl thought that what she wore to work should match the decoration of her shop. Since it was impossible to change the wallpaper of her shop that frequently, she put on the same yellow argyle sweater with blue diamond-pattern every day. She treated it somewhat like a uniform that the chain store salesmen and saleswomen were made to wear to show they were a part of the store. She saw it as a representation of professionalism. She had herself a bowl-cut hairdo and a pair of thick-rimmed glasses to go with the sweater to complete the whole look. Professionalism too. She did not mind persistence and she was sensitive to changes. She recognised her customers. She could tell the boy coming through the door was a new customer.

The boy was alone. Boys always shop alone, yet the girl knew

he was different. She felt that he was meant to be alone. His hair was scruffy, yet lustrous. He wore a creased red checker shirt and loose, fuzzy blue cotton pants. The faded colour of his apparel confessed a long history of wear and tear, by the washing machine, not by dust and dirt. Perhaps it was the smell of softener. Instead of coming across like a moth-eaten filthy homeless man, he looked more like a spellbinding eccentric pirate, a self-exiled royal member kind of character.

He glided with stateliness that he had been blessed with, towards the recently recovered rainbow-coloured shelves. He laid his svelte hand on the clothes. Although they had not exchanged any glance since the boy entered the shop, the girl intentionally took her eyes off him. She would not like to be stared at when she went shopping, so she had learnt not to fix her gaze at her customers for too long. Indeed, she was even more afraid of meeting the boy's eyes, letting him find out that she was captivated, slightly. She tried to look as if she was engaged with something, so she took out all her coins and stacked them into towers, one by one, with heads facing up, like how she usually did when she wanted to make her meaningless life seem more purposeful. Each time she looked up to steal a glimpse, she found that the once tidy shelves was becoming more of a tumult. She saw the boy rummaging through the clothes. He was like a tornado, destroying everything he touched. But it was alright. That was why a shop needed a shop keeper; that was why the world needed God. She could just tidy up the mess afterwards.

The boy approached the counter with a lavender liberty print shirt. He fetched a couple wrinkled hundred-dollar notes from his pocket. When he put them on the desk, the tower of coins collapsed. Some of the coins fell onto the floor. Tinkling sound lingered until the last coin stopped spinning. The boy bent down to retrieve the coins

while the girl was trying to straighten the notes by ironing with her palm. The boy handed her the coins. She tried to thank him with a smile, but it probably went unnoticed because the boy was putting the shirt into his linen shopping bag. He then sauntered out the shop.

The girl went out of the counter to clean up the shelves which looked like the confetti-scattered ground after a big carnival. When she was done with a shelf and she saw it was good, she let out a satisfied beam, until she discovered the indigo shirt with an embroidered rose was missing. She searched all over the shop for it but found her effort in vain. It could have been the boy, she pondered. It was the first day. She met the boy for the first time.

* * *

About a week later, the boy showed up in the shop in the lavender liberty print shirt tucked into a pair of tight-fitting emerald ankle-length pantaloons. With a bowtie round his neck and his James Dean pompadour hairstyle, he was a cocksure modern day dandy, an Oscar Wilde reincarnation. It was not the scent of softener this time; it was some kind of rosy fragrance of the perfume he had put on. He was a different persona from the previous week, but just as radiating. The girl had never seen her clothes integrated so perfectly into a style and fitted so meticulously as this. At one moment, she thought their eyes would meet but the boy was looking straight through her, like he was looking into eternity. However, the slightest thought of the boy's catching her admiring gaze was enough to send a rush of blood to her face. She did not want to expose her insecurity in front of a stranger, so she bowed her head, pretending to be looking for something in the drawer. The boy had targeted one of the shelves. He started going through the piles of clothes, stopped at a slim-fit red rodeo shirt with brass buttons. She could see this shirt fitting well to his flamboyant

style and his refined lean figure. He then stopped to check out an azure deep V-neck pull over cardigan. The girl was amazed at his taste. The boy then moved over to shelves on the other side of the aisle. She went over to the convoluted shelves to get them together again and in the meantime, avoiding the boy's noticing her apparent awe. Her drawer was still left open.

The aisle was narrow. When the girl was folding the clothes, her elbow sometimes unintentionally nudged the boy's back. She could feel the temperature of his body, and she could feel hers too. She never realised there had been such a heat within her body. For the first time she felt like she did not really know her body that well after all. The rosy fragrance seemed to have become more evocative, being vaporised and defused into the air, the air that she breathed. She sensed that the boy stopped at the third pile of clothes. She could hear some rustling sound right behind her. She imagined the boy taking a closer look at the shirt with floral patchwork of different shades of red. She could almost clairvoyantly envisage that shirt resting deservedly on his broad shoulders. After the boy had left the shop without buying anything, she found the red patchwork shirt was gone.

* * *

She started to count the days. It was the seventeenth day since the boy's first visit. He turned up again in the shop with a chic nerdy look. His hair was parted neatly to the right. His chiseled face was vaguely hidden behind a pair of big circular retro glasses. He was wearing an indigo shirt and a pair of classic black trunks, complemented by the fifties-looking knee-high socks. It was the indigo shirt with an embroidered rose that he was wearing, but a bit different. The rose popped on his chest. It was more alive and seemed to have grown bigger. The girl wondered if it was magic, some kind of charms that he

had put on the rose, or on her. When she looked closer, she discovered a silver lining sewn around the rose. It had not been there before. That was his charm. She could not believe how bold he was to wear the stolen shirt to the shop and he had even refined the shirt, her shirt. She was offended and indignant. He had done the shirt justice and on the other hand, the shop-lifted shirt had done him justice as well. He carried it off flawlessly like they were a match in heaven. Was justice supposed to work this way?

She turned around with her back on him to try to calm herself down. She took a deep breath, rubbed it between her eyebrows. She heard the boy's winklepickers clacking across the floor towards her and his rosy perfume was also closing in on her. She heard her increased pace of breaths: inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. The intensity of his perfume had become even stronger with her invigorated breaths. She covered her mouth and nose with the palms of her hands, but she could still feel her strengthened pulses and heartbeats. She tried to think of something beyond those walls which seemed to be caving in, but all she could visualize was him hunting for the next prey. She knew he would steal again, yet she could not pull herself together to stop him. The clothes could never look as beautiful on others as on him. She thought it was also selfish of her to want to keep the clothes in the shop than allowing them to settle where they belong. Another part of her felt like she was quicksanding into sin by conspiring with him on the theft and letting her desires overcome her. The desire to see the clothes beautifully modeled, the desire to see the boy again, the desire to dress him.

The clacking of the winklepickers paused for a moment. Could he have noticed what had been going through her mind? She was ashamed. She could not turn around and put on the unaffected

mask. She was too afraid to catch the boy stealing and the whole thing would be over. She then heard the boy striding out the shop. She timidly looked over her shoulder, catching the last glance of his indigo silhouette fading away. She walked towards the looted shelves and she looked around her Eden, beholding the imperfection that she once could not have tolerated. She collapsed on the floor, sighing and exhausted.

* * *

Another seven days had passed by since the boy took the bleached violet vest. She tried to deny that she wanted to see the boy appearing in the shop again wearing the stolen items. She reminded herself what a trauma it had been the last time. However, each day went by without seeing the boy, her heart sank a little. What was him, that she was mindful of him? She fixed her gaze on the shelves of beautiful clothes, especially the oversize vintage jacket she had just purchased. She was sure it would look amazing on the boy's elongated body. He could pull off such a dashing jacket effortlessly. She would love him to put it on for her, showcase it for her. She even secretly wished for him to come and steal the jacket or perhaps together with a whole bundle of other clothes than not visiting again at all. What was Eden if there was nobody to appreciate it? She went to pick up the jacket and hanged it on her body in front of the fitting mirror. It was really one of a kind. She caressed it gently and tightly, pressing it against her body. She spotted the tag dangling in the collar. She tore it down, squeezed it in her fist like she was in deep pain. She wanted the boy to have that jacket. She put the jacket back to where it had sat on the shelf and then put the creased tag in her drawer.

* * *

On the twenty-sixth day since their first encounter, the boy

finally showed up in the red floral patchwork shirt and a suspender clinging onto a pair of tartan knickerbockers, matched by a classy bowler hat. He impersonated wholesomely a courteous English gentleman. He treated his clothes like art. The girl had expected some anguish when she saw the boy again, but she was indeed glad to see him. To her, it was like something that had long lost was found again. He was the most pleasant sight in Eden; it was almost as if Eden had been made for him. He belonged here and he was back. She lowered her head as usual, fumbling with the creased tag he had torn off from the jacket, praying he would discover what she had prepared to dress him and he did. She was much contented.

* * *

Since the boy's last visit, she had been tearing off tags from her clothing items that she thought would suit the boy and that she would love to see on the boy for the next visit. She would just place the item on the shelves according to their colors and sizes to let the boy dig them out. It was just like a fashionable take on the game hide-and-seek. She was pleased when their minds agreed and the boy stole the clothes she chose for her. There were also occasions that the boy picked the tagged items that she did not intend for him, but he still blew her away by coming up with a faultless look incorporating the item. The boy came to the shop more often and the girl enjoyed the fashion parade of their collaborative efforts. Being in Eden could never be any happier.

* * *

It was the two hundred and fourteenth day and four untagged items had been accumulated at some corners of the shop. She had most recently detagged an ethnic-print cape and she was anticipating the boy to come and steal it as always. It was already nine-thirty at night, just half an hour away from the shop's closing time. The boy

had never come this late before but he did that night. The boy made his theatrical entrance, but he was not wearing any items from Eden that night. He was wearing a black deep v-neck body-hugging pull-over and a pair of super-tight skinny jeans. It was the first time he appeared with sunglasses; it was never the accessory for his rich repertoire of looks and he also had a new faux hawk hair cut. He looked just like a misbehaved troubled kid from the block. He staggered slumberously around the shop briefly and went straight out. He did not even touch the clothes on the shelves, let alone the ethnic-print cape. The girl was riveted. She could not help but followed the boy with her gaze until he left the shop.

* * *

From that day onwards, the boy visited the shop less frequently and each time he showed up, he looked more agonized: leather jacket, skull-print T-shirt, Dr. Marten's boots, spiked collars, bondage zipper pants, eye-liners and bad tattoos. The girl had wished it was just a phase but it had gone from angst to distress to gore. She wondered what had happened to the boy who was once a heavenly creature. She felt like a part of her had fallen. It ripped her apart every time she saw the boy. She was not sure if she wanted him to be in Eden anymore. She went over to the ethnic-print cape. It could have been another exuberant piece on the boy. She threw it onto the floor furiously and stomped on it as fervently as possible until she was out of breath. When she looked at the trampled cape full of foot-prints lying silently on the floor, her heart wrenched.

* * *

It had been a year since she first met the boy. She had dyed the ethnic-print cape black and had sewn onto the cape a scarlet velvet rose which was dripping blood. The tag of the cape was still in her

drawer. She waited for the boy to come again. It was him, arriving at nine-thirty. He was wearing a sleeveless leather shirt and a tight leather pants with a large spiked belt around his waist. An inverted-cross necklace was glimmering against the light of Eden. The girl watched the boy closely with the tag of the cape in her clenched fist. The boy spotted the black cape among all the colorful clothes in Eden. He jerked it out and lifted it up. He touched the velvet rose softly as if he could easily smother her life. He turned his head slowly to the girl. The girl's eyes were all brimmed with tears that gave halo to everything she saw.

Weight of the Wind Chimes

by Jennifer Yuen Wan Kiu

“I have a migraine,” my younger brother says weakly with these sad puppy eyes.

I sigh. “Nice try, Ah Gwong, but I’m not letting you off the hook. I know...Ma said you can stay home in your fluffy bed and watch stupid girlish cartoons, but I’m not her. Why are you always trying to chicken out of things?”

I know better than to believe him.

“I...I’m not...not... lying...It’s just...” Ah Gwong stammers, looking quite hurt.

Just to vent my anger, I stomp ahead of him, motioning him to follow. This brother of mine. He’s just too pampered. Taken care of too well, like a flower in a greenhouse. Ma loves him to bits, like letting him not do any exercise. No wonder he’s always sick. It’s almost spring, and he’s still wearing a long-sleeve shirt to keep warm. Hiding in it. He’s just “as timid as a mouse,” Ah Ye, Grandfather once said. Even my friends Kelly and Jay think he’s a total dinchenam, a freak who only lives in his world of computers. That’s why I came up with this scheme this morning to get him jogging (more like running now) with me. I vaguely check over my shoulder, and find that he’s sort of limping to catch up, like he’s going to faint. His skin’s even whiter than mine, and I’m a girl. Sheesh. Well, you’ve gotta be cruel to be kind. That’s my motto. Not that I’m letting on my secret agenda of gaining back some face by making him more presentable.

We soon reach Aunt Lan’s estate and decide to go up for a chat and a snack. Just to make it more fun, I challenge Ah Gwong to run up the stairs of the building. “Meet you at the rooftop! Then you’ll get to

see Aunt Lan! The loser has to wash the dishes for the whole week!” He is close to tears. Since Ba has left, the dish-washing routine has been passed on to us. Hmm...should I pretend to lose? Nah, that’s just not me.

By the time I hear soft footsteps at odd intervals, I am already half asleep on the concrete platform, like an egg being fried, sunny-side up. Ah...the post-exam sun feels so warm. I peep out of the corner of one eye and see Ah Gwong approaching with wobbly steps. He’s always walking like this. Says he trips a lot. Poor boy. No wonder he gets those odd scars now and then. He looks even more vulnerable now as he has taken off his glasses. Yet as he comes closer, his shadow looms bigger than ever, blocking part of my lovely sunlight. He himself though, seems to embody the sunlight as he stands in place of it like a divine figure. I rub my eyes and he becomes human again. He collapses by my side in exhaustion. I feel tired, too, but do not show it. I wriggle away a bit, turn my head back to the sun, and let out a satisfying smile.

“Ga...Gaje...” I suddenly seem to hear him whimper “elder sister.” His breathing seems soft and slow, almost wheezing.

“No way, you’re still washing the dishes,” I reply flatly. He always tries to bribe me whenever he wants to get out of something. That clever little rascal. Listening to the leaves rustling leisurely and the birds chirping away happily, I return to sleep heaven. Yet a faint, distant pounding sound disturbs me. Must be the crane. Darn construction workers, I curse. Still, I manage to doze off.

When I awake, half of the sun, the salty egg yolk, as Ah Gwong and I call it, has already been gobbled up by the shadowy mountain. The red sky looks as if it is splattered with blood. Yet I don’t feel like getting up.

“Wei, Li’s dish-washer, you can go down first...” I murmur with my eyes still closed. No reply.

“Ah Gwong?” I stretch a hand over to shake him playfully, but withdraw, as if electrocuted. My eyes pry open in shock. His... his body is so cold, like ice! I jerk up, look at Ah Gwong. His body is curled up loosely like a shrimp retreating in pain. All color is drained from his face, and his pupils are dilated, reflecting my own terror. His eyes. His watery eyes plead silently for help, filled with immense hopelessness. I try tapping his face with a few fingers to wake him, but find they have become numb.

“Don’t...don’t play, Gwong...time...time to go...go...home la, w...wake...” I strangle with the words. Frantically searching for his hand, I try to hold his watch up to his eyes to prove the time. The white leather strip of his watch is stained with some sticky orange ink. Strange. My brother hates orange. But he only stares intently at my confusion in silence. He cannot see, though his eyes are wide open. I look around, helpless. His glasses are placed beside him, but broken at the right rim, hastily fixed with tape. My eyebrows furrow at the sight ...? Why does this scene look familiar? Suddenly, I shiver as I feel the warm sun being plunged into the cold, dark night.

* * *

“Your son’s oxygen supply seemed to have been suddenly cut off at the time, Mrs Yeung.” The policeman has come again, two weeks after, this time reporting the coroner’s findings to Ma. I only half-listen, with the orange stain and Ah Gwong’s pleading eyes still circling in my mind. The officer pauses, his lips forming a thin line. He hesitates. “Mrs Yeung, examinations of your son’s esophagus show that he had been taking drugs. A chemical called codeine, which can be found in common cough syrup like Codeine Phosphate Oral

solution. An overdose of it can cause headaches, cramps, even slow and shallow breathing due to a lack of oxygen. Any further stimulation like vigorous exercise or sorts will immediately lead to death. Did you have any idea about the addiction, Mrs Yeung? And any clue about what he was doing at that time that may have hastened his death?"

Tears run their own course before I find a voice. "I..." I choke weakly, realizing the crime I had done. Those pleading eyes. Yet I killed my brother. I killed my own brother!

But my voice seems so soft that neither Ma nor the officer heard. The first question was enough to offend Ma. She stands up in protest and defends Ah Gwong, but I cannot hear the words. The living room blurs into a white swirl. Why did I have to force him? He's my brother! Why? Why didn't I believe him when he said he had a migraine? I chose not to believe my very own brother. I betrayed him, ran ahead, left him behind. I don't deserve...don't deserve to be Ma's elder daughter. I force myself to search for Ma's grieve-stricken face in the white swirl. It has been only a few weeks but she seems to have aged twenty years. Pain and guilt surge inside, making me sink deeper and deeper down into the sofa.

"Sorry, Mrs Leung, but I must ask one more thing. We discovered there were many wounds on your son's body, especially on his back and his arms. A few fractures were found in the rib cage. There are also some scars, which suggest these wounds must have been accumulated. No idea about this either?"

I see Ma's face frozen in shock. Then suddenly everything fast-forwards and Ma tells the officer to leave. Pinned down to the sofa, I try to gather words to confess. It is then I realize how bizarre the findings sound. Wait. Drugs? I remember Ah Gwong had won the government's anti-drug short-film competition last month. The school announced it

in assembly. It was unlikely that he would preach something he didn't believe in. Somehow the orange ink and the broken glasses flash back into my mind. What about the terrible accumulated wounds? God. Why did I never notice he always wore long-sleeve shirts? I must find out what's behind all this, not to clear myself of responsibility, but for those pleading eyes of my brother. I had failed him so, so many times. I need to atone.

* * *

I slip into my brother's room with puffed red eyes, but find nothing that tells me the truth. Only more evidence: a ripped-up poster of one of his favorite animation characters. Then my eyes rest on his computer. Luckily, the password to his blog is memorized by the computer already. Long passages of typed Chinese characters come out. No, these cold words are not my brother. I click on 'Protected Posts' of the latest week, which can only be viewed by the writer.

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

Derek and Han. When can I escape them?

My heart skips a beat at the mention of the two names. And I suddenly understand why the broken glasses looked familiar. Clement! No!

Clement was one of my classmates last year. I did not know him well. Or maybe I tried too hard to forget him, to forget what I saw. But all the horrific details come back instantly. The blood slowly leaking from his head. The punch from Han. The glasses flying away to the floor. The pleading eyes. Ah Gwong's pleading eyes. The arms desperately trying to protect its master. The scene I had told myself to forget.

I suddenly remember Ah Gwong returning late. The paint on his sneakers. The shattered animation VCD covers. The odd scars on

his arms and legs. His broken glasses...Oh god oh god. Why did I never connect these details together? What are my eyes for?

I saw everything, everything that happened to Clement behind the back door of the music room. I remember it was a Thursday. I was shaken; I always thought they were only joking around. Yet I did nothing. Derek and Han are sort of the tough guys at school, though they were in the same year as me. Derek is tall and stout, with red hair, and Han is the most muscular boy I've ever seen, always sweating horribly. I knew I stood no chance. I knew if I interfered, I would be the next to be picked on. But who was I kidding? I had a chance, yet I hid there. Now I am punished. But it can't be, it can't be. Ah Gwong...? The computer screen blurs into a slush of blue. Air seems to be running out. It serves me right to suffocate. But why? Why my brother?

Monday, March 2, 2003

It all started with the naming.

Stella had said the exact words that Thursday before I saw Clement. Derek had started calling her names like "pork chop." He even carved a pig on her desk to mock her, and sometimes came over to peek at what she had for lunch. I told her they were just joking around. When did I treat anything seriously? Maybe deep down I realized it was not something funny. But what did I do? Nothing. I call Ah Gwong a coward. Look who's talking.

Thursday, March 27, 2003

They forced me to drink the orangey cough syrup again. I hope I don't throw up at night...I feel a bit dizzy...but I promised Gaje to go jogging with her this morning. What can I do? I don't want to disappoint her again, don't...

Images of those devils force-feeding my poor brother the sickly cough syrup flood my mind. Tying down his hands. Fixing his head in

position with those gross, oily, sticky fingers. Ah Gwong choking. Ah Gwong...no!

I clutch the screen. No Ah Gwong. My eyes flicker in terror, searching.

Wednesday, March 19, 2003

I wish I could be tougher, like Gaje. I know she has a lot of expectations on me, as I'm the only man in the family now. But... should I tell her? How can I? I'll start crying before I even start...

What did I what did I do? I promised Ba to protect Ah Gwong. I promised! I was in the same year as those devils. They had picked on my friend. But I still did not stand up against them. But I dismissed my brother's wounds as "ordinary" boy stuff, fooling around. Poor Ah Gwong! Bullied by two monsters at school, then bullied by a heartless sister at home. I was no different from the bullies, trying to "toughen him up." Forcing Ah Gwong to be someone he wasn't. I am a hypocrite. I feel like throwing up.

* * *

"Ah Shum..." I did not notice that Ma was standing at the doorway until she called out my name. She usually called me "Gaje," following Ah Gwong. My heart skips another beat, then pounds quickly. Had she seen?

"Come. I've bought cheesecake. Your favorite." She tries to put on a smile, but the smile is wobbly and crooked, like a sad puppet forced to put on the wrong expression. I ponder on whether to tell her about Derek and Han. Should I tell the police? Will they arrest me for murder, too? That would serve me right, but how can I leave Ma alone now? She's already breaking apart.

We sit down at the kitchen table. Ma has bought Mango Napoleon as well, Ah Gwong's favorite. She looks at my expression

with pain in her eyes. Her whole face trembles, and she swallows hard to force back tears. We sit in silence, knowing neither of us has the mood to eat. Ma sniffs and pushes the cheesecake to me softly. Ah Gwong and I are the super sweet-teeth in the family. I sense her worry and try to take some. Tears slide down into the hollow chocolate swirl on top. The cake tastes salty, bitter. How can I be enjoying this when Ah Gwong is not here? And Ma, Ma, I killed your only son! I look down at the cake and can no longer face her.

* * *

Another cheesecake appears before me later as Eva and Jane come to visit. They have heard about the news from school. I shake my head in apology, and they exchange concerned glances. They start talking about what happened at school, but none of the words enter. Suddenly, Eva takes out a bottle of grape-flavored cough syrup, and I finally hear her saying that it's time for her medicine; she just caught a cold. One look at the bottle and I sweat all over. The urge to vomit rises up to my chest again. I rush to the toilet, hearing the bang of the chair falling onto the floor

* * *

3: 44 a.m. I stay wide awake in fear. I dare not fall asleep again. I dare not. I cannot bear to lose Ah Gwong again. I shake the mouse and find that Ah Gwong's profile picture is still there. I see those pleading eyes. Then those of Clement.

* * *

I can't believe my eyes. It's Ah Gwong there in the middle of the river. I run to him, trying to call him, but no voice comes out of my mouth. Ah Gwong doesn't seem to hear my trudging footsteps among the tide, and takes off into the sky as the divine angel I saw at the rooftop. I try to follow him, but discover that there is someone

clutching my legs. I look down into the water, which has turned orange, and see a bloody hand, attached to a small body. I peer closely and see that it is Clement. Streams of blood come out of his little head. Blood traces his tearful eyes. I look at my own hands. They are also covered in blood.

* * *

I shudder in terror and rub my hands. ...? No blood...How had I managed to dose off? The taste of cough syrup lingers in my mouth. I squint out of the window. It seems to be morning already, yet a thick layer of fog blocks my view of the sky. Where did he go? I run down onto the still chilly street, into the park that Ah Gwong and I pass by every morning. Separately, since I always preferred to sleep in. He had suddenly pleaded me to walk him to school that day, but I had ignored him and went back to sleep. A chill runs up my spine as I turn around. Were Derek and Han preying after my brother behind the bushes of this park? Is this where they force-fed him the orange cough syrup? Drops of water trickle down my cheek. I cannot let them this time. I dash around the park, looking, searching. I hear nothing but the sound of thunder. Rain gathers together and pours down on me. My black T-shirt becomes heavy and damp. I panic as the thought of Ah Gwong lost somewhere near hits me. What if he is alone and afraid in the rain? Is he crouched down, shivering? He'll catch a cold in this weather! Last September, he had a fever after insisting on swimming!

“Ah...Ah Gwong! Where...where are you? I..Did you re... read the comments I...I left on your blog? They start from the first day you wrote it...I...I'm sorry I never read it until now...will...” I choke as my throat is clogged with huge waves of water. I do not know if they are tears or rain. I wobble to the big tree where Ah Gwong and I used to sit under in primary school as we waited for the ice-cream cart

to come. But there is nothing left but a huge mount of brown leaves. I seem to see the pale body of Ah Gwong as he died, covered under the soaked leaves. Do you feel warmer, Ah Gwong? As I walk closer, I see a rusty rake leaned against the tree trunk, blocking my way. Behind the rake, I seem to see Clement's terrified face as he was beaten. I fall into the bench nearby. Will they ever forgive me?

* * *

Is that why Ah Gwong won't come back? Because he hasn't forgiven me? Luckily, the fog reminds me. Ah Gwong's short-sighted eyes! How can he find the way home? I buy a pair of new glasses for him, making sure it is not orange. I remember his hatred as he mentioned it when he saw the orange dish detergent as he piled our dishes next to the sink. But...what was his favorite color? I suddenly realize that I knew so little about my brother. I tiptoe into his room, and put down the glasses in front of his computer. I look around, and see the ripped poster. ...? What was the name of his favorite animation character again? He always talked about it passionately, but I was obsessed in my studies, and never listened to him properly. Suddenly, I hear the tinkling sound of a bell. It was the wind chimes I bought him during my trip to China. He had carefully tied it to the window pane. I watched it jingle with pride. Yet I had let him down. Were the wind chimes announcing that he was coming back? I stand by the window, waiting, waiting. Soon, I am enveloped by the pitch black sky. Right. No stars shall shine for me from now on.

* * *

The sun seems too bright, almost piercing when Ma and I go to the graveyard. I gently place the new glasses in front of Ah Gwong's lonely grave.

"Ah Shum...get...get up..." I vaguely hear Ma say. If kneeling

here forever can compensate for a small part of my wrongs, I am willing to.

* * *

Eva and Jane come to pick me up, trying to make me stay outdoors more. As we approach a department store in Causeway Bay, I suddenly hear it again. The condemning sound of the crane. That day that I ignored the warning...My heartbeat quickens to the sound, and sense, as always, the heavy shadow of my brother hanging over. I hear caring words from my friends, but I cannot bear to see their concerned faces anymore. I am not worthy of any consolation.

* * *

The frightening sound recurs. I try to find my way among the darkness in a blizzard. Ah Gwong peers out of a dark hole with his intent eyes, and beckons me. He passes me a knife.

* * *

I wear black again this day. If I had the right and the strength to dress up, I would give it to Ma. I silently watch her withering away, like a pale lily. At these times, Ah Gwong would have been able to cheer her up immediately. He would play her a song on the piano, or show him one of the funny short videos he made on the computer. He was such a sweet little boy. I have taken away the light of Ma's life, her precious son; now, I do not deserve to share the warmth of the sun. How can I compensate? I wish I could be more like him. My piano teacher once said that I just had no talent, unlike my brother. But I must try, I must try, I must try.

* * *

I cannot count the days anymore. As I get up to go to the bathroom this day, I hear Ma talking to Jane. "I have lost Ah Shum now. Every day she follows the same routine: she dresses in a long-

sleeve black shirt, though it's already summer. Then she locks herself up in Ah Gwong's room, types and types and types on the computer, lost in the virtual world. Other times, she sits in front of the piano, unwilling to leave. Then in the midnight, I hear her washing dishes in the kitchen again and again. I cannot get her to sleep. Lately, I've even discovered...discovered that the cutters in the house have disappeared...she...she has scars all over her body. "Ma's voice breaks. "She no longer talks to me now. Like a ghost lost in the world of the past."

...? Am I really like that?

"It's all my fault,..." Ma continues surprisingly. "After her father left, I never cared enough about her, never asking about her after returning home from work. I always thought she would be okay on her own, she was so tough; Ah Gwong needed me more. I was so wrong, so wrong, Jade...help me bring her back, Jade, please..."

* * *

I see Ah Gwong crouched down under our tree in our favorite park, planting a seed. He turns to me and smiles, passing to me a beautiful white lily with its roots still in a bundle of soil. The sun lingers in a circle on his hair, making him look like an angel. I crouch down with him, but he suddenly becomes angry. "Don't stay here," he says in a warning tone. Then he gets up, waves goodbye with a peaceful expression, and disappears.

Had I actually slept? Ah Gwong smiled at me. Does...does this mean that he has forgiven me? "Don't stay here anymore," Jane had warned me the other day when she came to visit. "Don't wallow in your guilt, Jess. Don't use it as an excuse for not doing anything. Yes, you made the wrong choices, but that doesn't mean you can avoid choosing a way to live. You have something your brother wanted to

have- a future. Don't waste it. You have to live, live your own life. You can never replace Ah Gwong, and you shouldn't think about doing that. 'Cause you're not your brother. You're two different people. But you both care deeply about your mother. Can't you see how worried she is about you?"

Ah Gwong's screensaver clicks on. It was one of the silly family photos we took on Lamma Island, Ma's favorite place. It was her last birthday, which clashed with the Lunar New Year. She was laughing as Ah Gwong and I each fed her a piece of her favorite ningo, glutinous rice cake. Behind us, blurred, were a bunch of lilies that we gave her as a present. Suddenly, a soft current of peace washes over me. I hear the wind chimes tinkle. Ah Gwong and I are different, but we are connected inside. I turn and gaze at the piano. My brother was always a quiet boy. I mistook his silence as weakness, but I did not see the pain in his silence. I thought I could bear his pain by perpetuating in his silence. Ah Gwong reminded me, I am only avoiding. I need to take up responsibility, tell Ma about everything I did wrong. This is the only way I can atone, the only way I can make Ah Gwong and Ma proud of me as me.

I close the door to his room and go into mine. I pull out a short-sleeved blue T-shirt from the closet and put it on. Ah Gwong always said I looked good in it. Then I open the bottom drawer and take out his white watch. I hold it firmly as I walk out to join Ma in the living room. I hope I can sleep tonight.

My Trophy Girl

by Flora Mak Ka Yu

A creased sheet of “Laughing Song” lies on the polished floor. The main bedroom is dimly lit by the table lamp. Poesy sits still before her dressing table, panting heavily. Her mascaraed eyes rest upon the pile of well-labeled school and university prospectus on the table. World’s Acclaimed School with the Best Future! Without a second glance, she dumps them all in the dust bin, which gives out a deafening noise.

She moves on to dump the used cosmetics and lotion. As she rummages, her hand eventually lingers upon the Professional Manager of the Year medal. It stayed behind the family photo taken in Florida’s Disneyland. It was awarded to Poesy by the internationally recognized Management Excellence Awards last year. Two months after that, she resigned, as the old saying has decided, “*The Woman works inside the house while the man works outside.*”

Poesy caresses the carving of her maiden name on the medal. “Cheung Shi Qing”¹. It cuts deep in her heart. She is the only one who understands what this medal means: her devotion and success of the short working life. Her colleagues and competitors have always joked that she would soon be seen in Time magazine.

It will remain as a joke then, a bitter one, she thinks.

She pushes the award aside unwillingly. The surge of passion she felt in the last ten minutes has subsided. She takes a facial cotton puff and starts wiping off her daily make up.

All the while, she shuts her ears from the sob in the living room, which continues like a string of drops of a dripping water tap...

* * *

¹ “Shi Qing” refers to poetic mood in Chinese, meaning similar to her English name, “Poesy”.

“When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy, and the dimpling stream runs laughing by; when the air does laugh...”²

“Sylvia, smile.”

It was the seventh time Sylvia got interrupted during her poetry reading practice. She gave a voiceless groan. Papa had not returned from work yet, so she dared not to disagree with Poesy. Poesy was sitting at the end of the dining table with her hands crossed. Relatives, teachers, neighbors... anyone who had met Sylvia would be carried away by her exceptional brightness at the young age of nine.

But not Mother. She is the strictest teacher ever, especially after her resignation.

“Okay, keep that in mind and start again. One, two, three!” Poesy switched on the metronome, which issued a dull rhythm of “dock, dock, dock”.

Sylvia steadied her feet behind the dining table. She first folded her hands behind her back and then bowed accordingly. She took a deep breath and began, in her angelic voice and accurate pronunciation. She widened her mouth, but did not smile.

Poesy thrust the sheet onto the table. “Are you playing against me? How can you win the competition in this way?” She demanded, “Do it again.”

Sylvia was still young to know how to express the complex feeling of being discouraged. She simply obeyed. She opened her mouth to begin, only which turned into a natural yawn. After a whole day of piano, taekwondo and “Non capisco l’italiano!”³ classes, she was exhausted. Surprised by her own unintended rebellious attempt, Sylvia burst into laughter. Two dimples were visibly dancing on her rosy cheek. Gemini used to remark them as some extra magic given to Sylvia apart from her extreme likeness of Little Poesy.

² William Blake’s “Laughing Song”.

³ “I don’t understand Italian” in Italian.

Sylvia stuck out her tongue and looked at Poesy pleadingly, like how Papa did every time he forgot to pay the gas bill.

But Mother had a weak sense of humour. Her expression hardened. “Tell me, do you still want to get into the top girl’s school?” Sylvia’s lips slightly shook and answered. It was not a matter of want, for “no” can never be the correct answer.

“And you know how hard it is...” Poesy was pleased and began to explain the admission requirement of St. James Girl’s College.

Meanwhile, Sylvia was attracted by the columns of flashing screens jumping in the windows of the opposite residential block. They were TV screens playing the finale of the big hit drama series, “Moonlight Resonance”⁴. Her classmates must be watching it with their family while she was scheduled to practice “Laughing Song”. Sylvia could tell that it was Mother Ho, the good and traditional woman, speaking in her affectionate tone.

But Mother Ho’s images were soon replaced by Poesy, who came to the front of Sylvia. “What should I do to make you understand the importance of this competition? It’s all for your own good!”

Sylvia was so immersed with the drama that she could almost imagine what Mother Ho was speaking, “Do what you like, son. I will support you even though...”

“Sylvia Tse!”

“You’ve blocked me from Mother Ho!” Despite Sylvia was obedient, tantrum-throwing was her instinct. She protested, timidly.

“Do you hear me? Would you read the poem now?”

She squeezed into the space between Poesy and Mother Ho.

“But I want to watch the finale!”

“Fine.” Poesy shouted, “If you work under others’ nostrils when you grow up, it’s none of my business!” She stormed into her

⁴ “Moonlight Resonance” is a popular Hong Kong TV drama series shown in 2008. Family value is the main theme of the series.

bedroom.

* * *

There is a thirty-six-year-old woman staring on the opposite side of the mirror. She has a blank look rejecting to be deciphered. Worms of wrinkles creep around her cleansed and straightened face. Her scrupulous lips loosen. Worries and doubts hang upon her clear arched brows.

Good evening, lady or Mrs. Poesy Tse?

Ha, have anyone told you that you look different? Take a look at those photo frames. You look different from the radiant bride leaning against the handsome Gemini; you look different from the plain and daring university graduate; and you look different from the girl in her kindergarten graduation robe, who had no idea how hard life was.

What is that? There is some dirt on the girl's face. You hate imperfection, don't you? I will clean it for you.

I reach the photo frame and try to clean it with a cotton puff. But the dirt remains there. It must be formed inside the frame. I unlock the photo frame and take the photo out.

Why, of course, they are the dimples. This is Sylvia's picture.

Why, of course, she is different from you.

Oh, there is another photo in the frame. It used to be displayed on the shelf when Gemini and I moved into the house. Do you remember when it was taken? Grandpa was holding the three-year-old Gemini and me with his big and warm hands. Our small eyes squeezed into lines of happiness and simplicity.

Gemini and I have known each other since we could babble. He was the kid of one of my Grandpa's employees. We grow up together and we are thirty-six now. We have stopped visiting Grandpa's grave in Mainland China a few years after Sylvia was born. On dining table,

we talked about the balance sheet, the stock, a relative's death, the report card, school teachers but seldom about Grandpa. Sylvia hardly knows who Grandpa was. So is Grandpa, he could never have met Sylvia. Oh, how many years have passed since he took the long sleep?

I lie on the bed and close my eyes, searching for slight traces of the fading episodes. I wish the lost voices would still come — Grandpa's laughter, Little Gemini's high pitched voice, the buzzing music of cicadas on a summer's night...

* * *

Sitting on the wicker chair at the balcony, Grandpa is reading his favourite pastoral poem in his slightly accented Cantonese. Little Gemini is moving his head gently in respond to the relaxing mood.

I walk in and take a seat. The sky is starry and inquisitive.

"Listen, your name is 'Shi Qing'. You can always face life pensively yet leisurely." As he folds my palm with his big hand, Grandpa speaks softly like a wizard casting a spell.

Little Gemini put his head over my bulging stomach. "It is doing gym." His mouth forms a perfect curve. "What do you want it to be?"

I think for a while. "I'd like her to stay happy and complacent."

Lightning strikes and illuminates the sky. Thunder follows like a low hum, dismissing the boundary of things.

...

I am trapped. In a washroom. The tiled floor is wet with dirty footprints. Crimson red floods the toilet bowl. I try to flush it. Blood comes out nonetheless, about to catch my shoes in any second.

I push the door hard until the lock is broken. I run out and find that I am in my secondary school's changing room. What hour is this? There is not any sound of girls playing basketball outside. The curtains

of the shower place shake like willows on a deserted river bank. I pass through the row of mirrors, which betray me as the seventeen years old student with pimples and a pony tail.

I have to retrieve my school bag before going home.

As I look around, I become aware of a silent figure in the corner of the changing racks. I catch my breath and turn cold.

When I first entered the school, I heard from the seniors that a Secondary Five girl had committed suicide years ago. She failed to keep her first place in the mock exam and jumped from the seventh floor. Her favorite subject was P.E. It was rumored that her spirit could be seen lingering in the changing room in late hours.

This figure, with her long hair untied and a uniform uncommonly red... I must have mistaken, for this cannot be true, it cannot be what I am thinking. No way... though her presence expresses an inexcusable sense of anguish and frustration.

She is staring at me.

She looks incredibly beautiful and tragic. "Why can't I get the first place?" Her icy gaze is pressing me for a satisfactory answer.

I instinctively put my hand over my stomach. I cannot feel the little creature kicking anymore. Why? I won't let the dead girl lay a hand on it. I gather my feet to run. I am slow because my legs are bloated.

When I cannot run anymore, she is only inches in front of me. My eyes are caught by her strangely familiar face. There are two dimples hanging upon her face.

She is Sylvia, laughing painfully with tears flowing from her eyes.

She clutches a piece of paper in her hand. I try to take it from her. It is the report sheet of the eighth grade music theory exam. The

one I failed when I was seventeen. At that time, I refused to eat for three days.

My eyes grow hot at the sight of the shameful report. At the same time, I notice that my uniform has become red. I look into a mirror and find that my pony tail is loosened. I scream.

Blood creeps over everywhere and dissolves the surrounding into emptiness.

...

The Chinese restaurant was boiling hot with the Tse family chatting and laughing. The waiters were serving the fruit dish. I sighed. Recently occupied with a proposal, I have almost forgotten that today was Auntie Tse's birthday banquet. In the past few months, Gemini worked out the arrangement and invitation all by himself.

"When was the last time you arrived for my family dinner on time?" Smelling slightly alcoholic, Gemini sounded indifferent. His glare seemed to burn a hole in my face. "I will take a flight back to London this weekend."

"And when should I stalk you in the airport?" I tried to be cheerful. "With your favorite egg tart?"

He looked at me — I would never have forgotten his look — with an apologetic and yet merciless smile. "It's a one-way ticket, Poesy."

Watching Gemini walking away from me was like a tiger clutching my heart and tearing it apart repeatedly. It was the fourth year we dated, two months after I have been promoted as the project manager.

His back is getting smaller and smaller.

No, you can't leave.

If you leave me now, we are not going to get married. If you

leave me now, there will not be any Sylvia, our daughter! My stomach aches like it is being burnt. When I look down, there is blood coming out between my two legs. I scream for help, but no sound comes out. Darkness eats all.

* * *

My baby is dead. Return it to me...

I have failed to stop Gemini from leaving. Will you come back? I could tell how dark that day was when crying was laid as a project without a deadline.

I wish I was seventeen again. I know I could get five As and one D if I study eight hours every day. I would get into the university and meet many people, including Gemini, who had returned from London. I would do well in PR. I would attend Sylvia's university graduation day.

The world is blurred and dark. I thought I saw it clearly.

But I don't. I can't.

"Dock, dock, dock." The steps stopped. Then, light comes in. A door is opened.

"Why do you cry, Shi Qing?" Gemini's face looms into view. It is not the soft and naïve face. It has grown rough and experienced. On top of all, he looks alarmed.

"Sylvia's..." I touch my flat stomach. My voice is hoarse. "I'm sorry about Sylvia...and I shouldn't get too obsessed with work..." Gemini ruffled my hair gently. "She has told me what happened in phone. I have trained her well. Darling, come in."

Yawning, Sylvia walks into the room while rubbing her eyes. The mark of tears is visible. Yes, my dear Sylvia. "Has Mama woken?"

"Yes. Get to your feet. Teach Mama how to laugh!"

I clutch Gemini's arm and shake my head. "All the while I

have forgotten my wish. I only want Sylvia to grow up happily. If you don't like reading poems, we don't read them anymore." I smile at Sylvia.

She comes over and takes Gemini's other hand. "Papa, 'm afraid that Mama's having a fever!"

I start to laugh, a bit hysterically, as the past vanishes and the present sings.

"Stupid." Gemini's eyes flash. "It's nothing but a nightmare, right?"

I nod. "Perhaps not entirely." As our eyes meet, he bursts into laughter too.

"Why are you two laughing?" Sylvia frowns at us. Honestly, my miniature looks best when she has the extra dimples.

Gemini gets hold of Sylvia and put her on our bed as we conspire to scratch her little stomach together.

Sylvia laughs, freely and loudly, without a reason.

I seem to hear Grandpa's voice, "When the painted birds laugh in the shade, where our table with cherries and nuts is spread: Come live, and be merry, and join with me, to sing the sweet chorus of 'Ha, ha, he!'"

That One Step

by Michael Tsang

Two worlds were juxtaposed side by side in Victoria Park. Deafening noises threatened to chisel through ear drums: Waves of outraged demonstrators shouting slogans, somebody on a double ladder leading the shouts with a megaphone, whistles fluted here and there every twenty seconds, news reporters straining to find their voices in their live coverage. The world next-door was a deserted road cordoned off by the police who sometimes tapped their palms with their batons and closely monitored the throng of demonstrators. Four huge and shining police cars lined up along the cordon, and were prepared to get the demonstration under control.

In between the two worlds stood Martin, who, like a defeated athlete, looked vaguely ahead for the finish line, unconscious of the noise drowning him.

“Martin,” someone shook his shoulder excitedly, “Wow! You really should check out the back, the people are going crazy. The other organizers are working the crowd. What’s wrong? Why isn’t there anyone filling this spot?” It was Brad, stepping onto the blank spot on Martin’s right.

“This is the spot for Jane!” Martin elbowed Brad away, so that he could feel Jane with him.

His dear Jane.

* * *

It was his final year in university. Martin and his colleagues of an intervarsity activist group were gathering in his university, preparing for a demonstration that called for democracy in China. Buckets of paints of different colours randomly surrounded some snow white

banners. Hand-made signs scattered everywhere; polystyrene lunch boxes, too.

Firm footsteps suddenly hammered into the floor. The Vice-Chancellor appeared out of nowhere and walked past Martin until he stopped in front of one of the banners.

“What are you doing?” he asked, the hint of authority unmistakable in his quasi-friendly voice. He continued without waiting for an answer, “I know you are organizing an activity to raise our students’ concern towards our motherland, and I appreciate your efforts, really.”

A few people gave up listening and went back to their work.

“There is, of course, nothing wrong with extra-curricular activities, but since they are extra-curricular, shouldn’t you first make sure you have managed your studies? We are soon having year-end examinations, I am sure it would be in your best interest if you start revising now.”

“Other universities have already had their exams,” Martin replied with a sneer.

The Vice-Chancellor turned around to look at Martin. As he did so, his heels moved sideways and was about to step on the white banner. The nearest girl immediately reached out to hold the heels back. She lost her balance and fell right on the banner. The Vice-Chancellor stumbled but saved himself from falling.

Martin sprang to his feet and rushed to her aid at once. Her hands were red and swollen from scratching. They glared up at the Vice-Chancellor with fiery eyes, who returned a gaze more ice-cold than before. Five seconds of dead silence elapsed and he slowly walked away.

“Thank God I didn’t make the Vice-Chancellor fall on his

knees,” the girl was trembling.

“He is lucky that you aren’t hurt, otherwise he’d be in trouble!” Martin retorted angrily.

Their eyes met, and at that very second they knew they were drawn to each other. From then on, they met every other day, despite being from different universities.

That was two years ago. Three months after graduation they got married, and decided to work in a political organisation concerned with various issues in Hong Kong and China. Their pay was modest, of course. Fortunately, both of their families showed support to the couple’s work by sharing the mortgage of a flat, and this enabled them to enjoy working together, and treasure the support and understanding that only they could offer to each other.

Yet it didn’t remain long, for unexpectedly Jane became pregnant.

Jane was allowed to take a 3-month maternity leave, which was more than she was entitled to, but Martin persuaded her to quit work.

“But I don’t want us to be in the red,” Jane protested.

His response was gentle. “Sweetheart, the most important thing right now is that you stay strong and live healthily. I don’t want you to tire yourself.”

Jane gave in. Everything went well and two months ago, on 15th April, Luther was born.

The next day, Martin’s mother was already asking when she could look after Luther, but Martin couldn’t share the joy. He just received news that students were gathering in Tiananmen Square following the death of a Chinese official. It’s high time Hong Kong did something, he thought.

Jane's eyes went wide when she heard that Martin was going back to work. "But Luther is only one day old!" She glanced at Luther, sleeping soundly in her arms.

"Don't worry, honey," Martin kneeled beside the cot, "Mum will help take care of him, and I'm sure you'll be fine. You want to do something to help the students in Beijing as well, right?"

And he turned and left.

Luther woke up and cried. His mother muttered, "Your father didn't even kiss you."

* * *

The frenzy in China spread to Hong Kong. Martin's organisation spent night after night planning waves of activities to support their counterparts in Beijing. Martin decided to do more propaganda, so he went on a tour to several universities and tertiary colleges around Hong Kong.

One day in late April, Martin was giving out leaflets in a university, whose affiliated hospital was where Jane was staying. They were just two blocks away, but Martin thought to himself, "she's probably asleep under sedation." His colleague, Brad, was already urging him to get on their van for their next stop.

Three hours later, in another university, when they were addressing a crowd of yelling about the grim situation in China, some guards rushed onto the stage and pulled them down. They had Brad under control soon but Martin fought back. Immediately there was an uproar from the audience, and several students jumped onto the stage to stop the guards. Touched by the students' outrage, Martin shouted, a finger pointing up sharply in the air:

"Long live democracy!"

That became the punch line instantly and the students, now

separated from Martin by a flood of guards, were booming the line, echoing with Martin.

The two were yanked into the security room violently. Before throwing them out of the university, the security manager sternly gave the two verbal warnings, and threatened to call the police if they dared to step into the university again.

Martin didn't want to go back to his office. He regretted not seeing Jane, and he wanted to see her now desperately. When he arrived at the hospital, Jane was not there, and her belongings were cleared away. A nurse passed by and informed him that Jane had been discharged the night before.

Martin couldn't be more exhausted when he reached home and saw Jane asleep in bed. The sunset of May painted a complexion of carrot orange and chrome yellow on her face. Although she looked peaceful in her sleep, her lips were flat and horizontal. Martin had never seen Jane in such a sedated state, gentle but alert. He kissed her cheek ever so slightly and fell asleep the next second.

He woke up to the ringing of the home telephone. Jane was not in bed. Martin went to the living room and picked up the phone. It was Brad, who reprimanded him for missing the regular night meeting. There was no sign of Jane.

“Hey are you listening? Get your ass back here now!” Brad shouted angrily.

Martin promised to return to the organisation's headquarters immediately and hung up. The next day would be another busy day, but where was Jane?

He frantically searched the whole house, but to no avail. At last, he found a note Jane left on the refrigerator, saying that she had taken Luther back to the hospital for a regular checkup.

A regular checkup after leaving the hospital for only a day? He was baffled.

But Martin did feel charged and recovered from his defeat in the afternoon, and merely looking at Jane sleep seemed to be the cure. For the next few days, he continued his tour with even more passion, speaking with more enthusiasm every time, getting more and more students to sign up for protests and activities.

And every night, he would call home, and ask Jane how she was, and she would reply she's fine before talking about what funny things Luther did during the day. Martin would laugh and say, "I'm glad you are happy." She would respond, "And Luther's happy too." Then, Martin would continue and tell her how fervent the students he saw in the day were, how many more volunteers they have got, and many things that Jane could only listen to but not take part in. And then Luther's cry could be heard over the telephone, and Jane would say she had to go. But every time before they hanged up, Jane would say in a voice almost like pleading,

"Come home soon."

Didn't he want to come home too? Didn't he want to meet his beautiful wife, to chat about the sense of satisfaction he had when he saw other young faces burning with enthusiasm, to express how much he wished she were there, to tell her how Brad and other colleagues envied him of having such a perfect family? "A loving wife and a cute son, I want that too." Brad once lamented.

One day Martin finally got a break from work. At 9 p.m. he arrived home. Jane was sitting at the dining table and immediately jumped up from the chair.

"You didn't tell me you're coming back!" Her voice was full of surprise.

Martin hugged his beautiful wife and gave a genuine, contented laugh.

“Let me heat up the soup for you.” Jane hurried into the kitchen.

Martin sat down, and it was then he noticed Luther was in his baby car by the table.

He suddenly realized this was the first time he took so close a look at his own son. He smiled slightly. The baby’s mouth twitched slightly and some cute noises came out. Was he trying to say ‘papa’? Martin bent down and put his ears closer by the baby, but he could not make it out. The baby then stretched his chubby hands out at his father, and what stroke Martin at that moment was how he also stretched his hand up in the air that day in the university, yelling his extemporaneous slogan with the students. Like father, like son!

“Did you come back to bring Luther a present?” Jane spoke from behind.

What present? Martin turned to look at Jane with a blank look.

Jane set down a bowl of soup on the table and surveyed him quietly, then said, almost in a whisper, “Luther is one month old today.”

Martin’s mood vanished in a pop. That was a fatal mistake. In Hong Kong, one month old is a major mark for babies, and many parents invite friends and relatives over and have a feast together.

The air around them seemed to have become ten times heavier. It compounded with the awkward silence and became so thick that Martin thought that he could be choked by air.

Without saying another word to fan the embarrassment, Martin tried the soup.

“This is very nice! Since when have you learned how to cook?”

“I have to learn it, now that I am taking care of Luther.” Her reply was cold.

That was the last thing they said to each other that night. After dinner, Martin took a shower and by the time he finished, Jane was already asleep in bed. He tiredly closed his eyes. The next morning Martin found Jane sleeping on the sofa in the living room, Luther's cot beside her.

A sigh was all he managed to give. He gently pulled a blanket over her before leaving the flat.

Although the night didn't go as well as he wished, he once again felt his motivation was back. The enormous workload caught up and propaganda was ongoing every single day. One day Martin could do a street theatre performance in Central, and the next day he would talk about the students in Tiananmen Square in an opinion program on the radio. The end of May approached, and danger lurked in Beijing. Martial law was declared in Beijing less than a month ago on 20th May. There was rumour that the military would suppress the demonstration. When the rumour reached Hong Kong on 30th, rage boiled and escalated throughout the city. Martin's organisation liaised with other political groups and on that night they pulled every string to call on every citizen in Hong Kong to march to the Xinhua News Agency the next day. As if the situation was not grim enough, Typhoon Signal No. 8 was hoisted a few hours later. Despite the poor planning and lack of promotion, hundreds of people showed up amidst rain and gush.

But unlike other days, that day there was something else occupying Martin's mind. When the protest ended, he ran off immediately to buy a cake and at 7 p.m. sharp he stepped into his home.

“Happy birthday, sweetheart!” It was 31st May.

Jane was preparing dinner and she squealed when she saw the

cake. Her beam was even wider when Martin bought Luther a toy: a red tiny elephant doll with unmatched green jacket, but nonetheless a toy.

Jane became such a great cook that Martin thought he ought to come back more often. He thought the two of them could finally enjoy their private time. Later that night he again came out from the bathroom after shower, this time wearing nothing. Jane was sitting on bed, reading newspaper. She looked up and met Martin's gaze, then she frowned.

“Put on your pajama, darling. You'll catch a cold!”

Martin stood in bewilderment for a whole ten seconds. In the end, he obeyed in silence reluctantly. When he was about to slip in bed, Jane, in her usual composure, put down the book on the bedside table and turned off the bedside lamp.

“Good night, darling.” She gave him a kiss.

There they were, lying in bed, both neatly dressed in pajamas, looking at the ceiling.

At length, Martin spoke softly, “Hey, Jane, when are you coming back to work?”

“Oh I haven't given it much thought. Luther's still too young, you know. He needs me.”

How could she answer so casually?

“What about me? I need you too!” He raised his voice.

“Why are you complaining? You earn money for us, and I take care of Luther. Isn't this implied by what we are doing now?” She looked at him.

“I have never agreed to that! Mum and dad can take care of him. Why can't you go back to work? I miss having you by my side when I am working.” He looked at her too, straight in the eyes.

“You are always thinking about yourself. I miss you having in the house too. Can I ask you to give up the work you like and stay with me every day?”

“The work I like?” he repeated incredulously. “Didn’t you like it as well? I understand Luther is important to you. He’s important to me too! He will succeed my work when he grows up.”

She sat up. “You are the father. You ought to show more love to your son! You hardly spend time at home and when you call home you never ask how he’s doing! How ridiculous! I know you are busy working, so I’ve never, until this moment, thought of complaining about that!”

She sank back in bed and turned away from him. The dense conversation exchange ended as abruptly as it started.

The next morning, Martin left for work at 6 a.m. He needed time to cool down and then he knew everything would be back to normal.

Then the inevitable took place. The military cleared the Tiananmen Square by force yesterday morning, 4th June 1989.

Martin called home that afternoon. That was the first time they talked to each other after the quarrel. Jane had seen the morning news and could not stop weeping when she heard Martin’s voice. Martin didn’t have much time to spare, so he spoke briefly about the large-scale demonstration they were planning on 5th June. He invited Jane to come. “Bring Luther, too,” he added.

But Jane refused. “Luther’s too young. The crowd would scare him. Besides, who knows if the same thing will happen in Hong Kong?” And her voice was lost again.

He assured her that a military crackdown would not happen in Hong Kong, but — “Stop it! Please, stop it.” She interrupted and

her voice croaked. “I know you should go, and I give my support. I think you are doing the right thing, but...No, I just can’t risk Luther. Please.”

Brad was signaling to him to go back to the meeting.
He slammed the receiver down on the phone.

* * *

“Long live democracy! Shame on military crackdowns!”

The throng of demonstrators took their first step, progressing to Happy Valley where the Xinhua News Agency was located. Thousands of people wearing black inched forward, their fury soaring every second. The effective slogans brought the chorus of cries in unison.

Martin’s mind was well worked after his reminiscence. Now he realized that each and every step he was taking, he was taking it for Jane. Once they started walking, it was difficult to maintain Jane’s spot on his right, but Martin did his best by stretching out his right hand and glowered at whoever tried to come near.

“Martin! Martin! Martin!” Brad was calling from behind again, this time madly. Martin turned around and gave him a reproachful look.

“Don’t look at me like this!” he glared back, and then he handed a DynaTac mobile phone over, the only one their organization has. “It’s Jane.”

Martin snatched the phone and said cheerfully, “Hi, darling.” She wanted to feel the atmosphere!

To the absolute contrary, Jane was weeping.

“Come to...hospital...now...” Her voice was distorted so badly that Martin could barely understand her words.

“What happened?”

“Luther...fever...104 degrees...”

Martin didn't know what to say. The demonstrators were shouting deafeningly now. Looking around, he felt touched that his fury with the military crackdown was connected with so many people, people who share a common goal and wish with him.

“I need you...just this time...just one wish...”

“I am in the middle of — ”

“Pleeeeeeaaasse!” Jane screamed a long, utter cry of anguish, as if she was screaming to heaven.

He froze on the spot in the middle of a yelling crowd. He was at a loss. The clumsy mobile phone slipped from his sweaty palms and was caught by Brad, who checked and found that the line went dead. He left to return the mobile phone after taking one last look at Martin.

Martin looked ahead, the News Agency was less than 500 metres away, but his legs could not move. He was only drifted by another force: The league of protestors shouldered him forward, elbowed past him, the organizers calling at him to catch up. But Jane's weep came piercing to his heart.

A banner hit his back from behind, and he finally stumbled on his knees.

Through the silhouettes of the demonstrators passing by, he looked up at the pale sky, where Jane's weep seemed to come from. He could hear no other sound — but, wait, there was some another sound now. It was a baby's cry. Luther's cry. The cry and the weep superimposed and the soundtrack was a shrilling summon, forcing him to make a decision.

The decision.

Slowly, but resolutely, Martin stood up, and made that one step.

A Simple Case

by Eunice Chu Hoi Ying

Outside the window cars are bustling. They come from almost every direction: Sha Tin, Mong Kok, Central. Drivers meet each other at the transportation joint: No eye contacts, no morning greets. It is 7:30 a.m.. The cars squeeze themselves into a swirl, surrounded by clusters of high-rise buildings.

The traffic jam outside is not something that Inspector Lee would care. Clara has prepared him toast and coffee, as usual. Yet Inspector Lee pays no attention to his much-needed breakfast. He is staring at the freshly-delivered newspaper.

The South Asia Post

A South Asia Post Publication | Volume LXV | No. 78
June 12, 1953

GUILTY? OR NOT.

Feng Shui Chen shouts “I’m innocent!”

Will Westra and Celine Benitez

Chen KUMCHUNG, court on charge of larcency of the renowned Feng Shui consultant world-class diamond prossessed (publicly known as Feng Shui by Chong HIUMEI, recently Chen), will today be brought to revealed rich widow. Stephen Ho,

renowned barrister, also chair of the Hong Kong Bar Association, finds Chen's conviction predicable.

Chen, in an exclusive interview with the South Asia Post, got flustered when asked about his suspected crime. "I was only there to conduct a Daojiao ceremony requested by Meimei (Chong HIUMEI)! I'm innocent!" He shouted.

The police, however, found Chen not that innocent. Inspector Lee, chief officer responsible for the case, tells there is solid evidence revealing Chen's contacts with potential diamond buyers. Chen's Swedish bank account, disguised by another name, was found receiving a HK\$10,000,000 deposit shortly after the theft, which was the exact amount Chen offered to buyers, the police reported.

Wong SHASHA, housekeeper of Chong HIUMEI, admits that there has been a close relationship between Chong and Chen. "Ms Chong simply believes

in him. Feng Shui Chen is a frequent visitor," says Wong, "He was paying his regular visit to the villa that day." Wong continued to describe that Chen arrived unusually early and was left alone in Chong's bedroom for more than 30 minutes. "He has always known about the diamond." Added Wong, "He claims that the diamond brings bad fortune."

But whose bad fortune will this be? The case was reported on May 13 by Chong's housekeeper Wong SHASHA, and has been the talk of the town. Chong HIUMEI, the rich widow who has never been known to the public, was not publicly seen after the case.

Stephen Ho, chair of the Hong Kong Bar Association, says, "the evidence are all there. The motivation, the witness, the transaction records. Nothing is missing. I just find the conviction predicable."

Inspector Lee folds the newspaper. Not paying extra attention to his coffee and toast, he grabs his suitcase and leaves the apartment. He gets on the tram in Wan Chai.

A couple beside him is reading the same piece of news.

“Don’t you find it hard to believe? That’s why I don’t believe in love. MEN.” The woman snorts the word out loud. “They come and deceive love. Then what? They steal your money!”

Poor man, thinks Inspector Lee.

The man, probably her husband, seems nevertheless not affected by his wife’s opinion. He gently lays the newspaper on his lap and replies, “Honey, not every man is like that.”

“Or you should rather say not every woman is that superstitious as Chong. At least I would personally not believe in the so-called ‘Feng Shui Master’.” The woman rolls her eyes.

“Good for you, dear. Yet this man,” the husband looks back to the headline, “is really too obvious.”

Too obvious.....

Inspector Lee returns to his deep thoughts.

Is it?

He remembers first seeing Debby in the police station a month ago, the day when the case was reported.

* * *

TESTIMONY 1: Leung Hoi Ting, Debby

He looks into her eyes. Her eyes are dark and big, glistening quietly like a pair of black pearls.

The girl looks back, fearlessly. She is slender, nice-looking and well-groomed.

19? At most 21, Inspector Lee reckons.

Her black long hair is smooth and straight, gently covering half of her slightly plump bosom.

“I am Inspector Lee, no. 4332. Central Division, squad A. I am now taking testimony with you. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say will be used against you in a court of law. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“What’s your name?”

“Leung Hoi Ting, you may call me Debby.”

“Age?”

“20.”

“Ok. So the case was reported on May 13, 1953. A diamond was stolen from your home a day before that. True?”

“Yes.”

“Were you there when the diamond was stolen?”

“No. I was in Macau, on a study trip.”

“What do you know about the diamond?”

“Aunt Mei told me about the diamond when I was 18 years old. It is very important to her, for it was left by my uncle before his death. I never know exactly how much that worths, but it is probably really expensive as Aunt Mei locks it with a specially-designed safe.”

“Specially-designed safe?”

“Yup. It is somewhere in aunt’s bedroom. Nobody knows exactly where the save is.” She hesitates for a second, and continues, “But perhaps Chen knew it.” She shrugs.

“How would you describe Chen?”

“Oh I am not surprised if it’s Chen who stole the diamond. In fact it is pretty obvious, isn’t it? I mean, just Chen being alone in the

room, and after that, the diamond is gone.”

“Please answer the question: How would you describe Chen?”

“Oh I’m sorry.” She looks slightly shocked.

“...I mean, Chen? Oh he’s a nasty man. He has been Aunt Mei’s Feng Shui consultant even before I could perceive what Feng Shui is. I never believe in him. I have tried to talk this over with Aunt Mei, but she never listens. I said, this man is gonna take your money away, bit by bit. And I was right, wasn’t I? For all these years, Chen has been coming to our home frequently, almost twice or three times a month, if not more. I simply do not understand. People consult feng shui master about their homes or luck at most once a year, but Chen would always manage to find excuses and come over for all sorts of Daojiao ceremonies. I heard that he has deceived quite a lot of clients. Sooner I reckoned Aunt Mei may actually knows all about this. Perhaps she can’t bear to let Chen go. She loves to meet him.”

“Do you know if Chen knew about the diamond?”

“Yes, of course!” She widens her big eyes, staring at Inspector Lee in disbelief.

“I mean, look. HE is the one who has always told Aunt Mei that the diamond brings bad luck. He just wants Aunt Mei to tell him where the diamond is. I bet that he has been interested in the diamond for long. They always lock themselves in Aunt’s room for ‘ceremonies’.” She rolls her eyes. “I don’t even want to know what they’re up to.”

“When did you last see the diamond?”

“Inspector, I have never actually seen the diamond.” She sits back, throwing a helpless smile. “I’m not Chen, who has got all the trust. By the way, I wasn’t finished just now. Inspector, Chen has always persuaded Aunt Mei to take the diamond out for his ceremonies. The entire house, I mean our workers, knows it. But my aunt is a kind-

hearted person,” She snorts again. “She hopes to save the diamond, and all her wealth, for charity.”

She pauses. Before Inspector Lee can interrupt, she continues, “But see, I can tell you two facts. First, Aunt Mei checked the save again before I left for Macau. The diamond was there. Second, I was told that Chen arrived early that day. He never arrives early. And I am sure my aunt hasn’t called to change the time. She isn’t that kind of person who would change plans just on the spot.”

She pauses again. Before Inspector Lee makes any comments, she seizes the air, “And perhaps one more thing.”

She looks surreptitiously around (Though there is nobody in the room except Inspector Lee and herself). She grasps, and says slowly, word by word. She stares straightly into the Inspector’s eyes.

“Chen has been contacting buyers. I have been watching him.”

* * *

TESTIMONY 2: Chong Hiu Mei

“...Anything you say will be used against you in a court of law. Understand?”

Inspector Lee finishes his usual speech.

In front of him is a woman in her fifties. She looks emaciated.

So this is the invisible rich widow Chong, Inspector Lee thinks. He would not have recognized her as a rich woman if he is not told to even take notice of her. To Lee, she is a bit too skinny for her age. Pale, almost ghostly like. No makeup. Her hair, half in gray, is roughly tied in a loose bun. However, she has a pair of bright eyes. The eyes looks straightly into Lee, just like the way Debby does, only a bit more determined, more... Inspector Lee wonders — in extreme serenity.

“Inspector,”

A weak, but steady, voice.

“I can remain silent, right?”

Lee nods.

“I want my lawyer.”

There is something in Chong that almost haunts Inspector Lee. He cannot figure out why. Perhaps her ghostly stare? Or the atmosphere brought about by her existence?

Chong talks even less after her lawyer’s arrival.

According to her lawyer, Chong checks her save personally everyday, around basically the same time. That’s her habit. She refuses to comment on her relationship with Chen. Nor her beliefs in Feng Shui and Daoism. But there is one exception...

“Did Chen know about the safe?” Inspector Lee asks.

Chong raises her head suddenly. She cuts into her lawyer with a single word, “No.”

“How about your niece, Debby?”

“No.”

“Inspector,” she leans forward, “is this over?”

Her eyes widen, her throat tightens. For the first time, Inspector Lee sees fluctuations in her eyes.

“Almost.” Inspector Lee calmly replies.

“What if I say I do not wish to procecute anybody?” She raises her voice, “Can this just come to an end?”

Inspector sees blood red roots in Chong’s eyes, bulging distinctively from one another against the white of her eyes.

“Ms Chong, please be seated.”

* * *

TESTAMONY 3: Chen Kum Chung

There is a saying in Cantonese called “喪門狗”, meaning an expelled dog: Frustrated, hopeless and undeniably pathetic. Inspector

Lee looks at Chen, who stumbles himself on the wooden chair. He looks so much different from his looks on TV. Inspector Lee can't help associating Chen with the image of expelled dogs — Losers.

In fact, as Inspector Lee recalls, he sees Chen quite often on TV, especially during the Lunar New Year when fortune tellers spring out from nowhere, telling what kind of bad luck one would encounter in the coming year. Inspector Lee has always asked Clara not to believe in these people. He finds it hard to understand why women (ok, generally speaking) are always believing in these non-sense. But they may be good. At least people who spend money on feng shui stimulate the economy. That is to say, thinks Inspector Lee, so long as he is not the one paying.

“...Anything you say will be used against you in a court of law. Understand?”

He isn't listening. Chen remains looking down, mumbling words occasionally. “The inspector is talking to you.” Inspector Lee says sternly.

Chen raises his head. Inspector Lee can almost count Chen's stubble on his chin.

“Inspector, I'm innocent! I havn't stolen Meimei's diamond!”

“On May 12, 3:00p.m., it was reported that you were at Chong Hiu Mei's house, alone in her bedroom, true?”

“Yes. Meimei originally has an appointment with me at 3:30p.m.. I received a call from Meimei that she wished to change the appointment half an hour earlier. I was free that morning, so I arrived at her house half an hour earlier as requested.”

“And you stayed at Ms Chong's bedroom? What did you do there?”

“Yes. I conducted the Daojiao ceremony in her room. One's

bedroom is the place that affects your ‘Qi’ most. It’s most effective having ceremonies there.”

“What did you do there at 3:30p.m., before Chong arrived?”

“I waited.” Chen replies plainly.

Inspector Lee stares at Chen for a few seconds, then lowers his head to jot down Chen’s words.

“Shit.”

Chen blurts the word out suddenly.

He swings his head and leans backwards in a vigorous action.

Inspector Lee is alerted.

“So you aren’t believing me?”

His cuffed hands trembling.

“Inspector??”

He is shouting.

“Then why are you asking??”

Chen stands up suddenly, agitated. Inspector Lee backs off at once. He is used to these situations. Suspects get mad in face of extreme frustration. Lee calls for backup.

“I haven’t said so. I am just recording your words, alright? Now, Mr Chen, would you please.” Inspector Lee indicates the seat.

Chen stands still for a moment or two, staring blankly at Inspector Lee. Finally, he sighs, and throws himself on the seat again.

“How much do you know about the diamond?”

“Ha. The diamond, yes. What a pitfall. I’ve told Meimei that it brings bad luck. See it now? Both of us are in trouble. I said to her, you need to get rid of it by ceremonies.”

“So you know about the diamond?”

“Yes and so what? I said, the diamond brings bad luck...”

“And you help Ms Chong to get rid of it without her permission?”

“NO! Inspector you’re not believing in me at all! Ok I tell you, I know even where she puts it and her password, but so what? She herself told me those. But that doesn’t mean that I have stolen it!”

“There’s solid evidence showing that you have been in contact with potential buyers. \$10,000,000 is your offered price, is that true?”

Chen’s eyes bulged. His mouth remains open, speechless.

“No... no, well, Inspector, I was just...”

One of Inspector Lee’s mouth corners lifts.

That’s it.

Close file.

* * *

Inspector Lee walks out the room. It is a simple case. There is no need to spend too much time on it. He turns right at the corner and enters the office. He is looking for Sergeant Luk.

“Sergeant, please write a report on this case. The court needs it.”

Inspector Lee gives Sergeant Luk the documents after a brief explanation. Luk is a freshman in the police station. Inspector Lee prefers him to start with some simple documents.

It is a little while after that when Sergeant Luk knocks on Inspector Lee’s door. The pile of documents is in his arms.

“Good afternoon, Sir!” Luk salutes.

“What’s the matter, sergeant?”

“Sir! I’m finding some problems with the case.”

“Permission to speak.”

“Firstly, I’ve done some research, the diamond should worth at least HK\$50,000,000 in the black market: Why is Chen offering such a low price? Just HK\$10,000,000? Secondly, it’s about Ms Chong’s niece, Debby, she is...”

Inspector Lee interrupts Sergeant Luk impatiently.

“Look, Sergeant,”

“Yes Sir!” A stamp on the floor.

“Your order is to compile a report for the court. Do what you’re ordered.”

Inspector Lee returns to his documents — a silent indication of the Sergeant’s exit. Luk stands there still for several seconds, and eventually leaves the room.

What a kid. Inspector Lee thinks when he reaches for another pile of documents. This kid is thinking too much and he’s digging into something he does not even need to know.

“Research.”

Inspector Lee let out a dry laugh. Experience will tell him soon what things he ought to research on.

This, thinks Inspector Lee, is just a simple case. A simple case indeed.

* * *

Inspector Lee gets off the tram at Sheung Wan. He swims through the busy crowd and slips into a small Chinese restaurant at the remote corner of Bonham Strand West. There are only several customers, mainly old men in their sixties or seventies, listlessly flipping newspapers. Inspector Lee sits down at a booth at the corner, with his back facing the entrance.

“Coffee and toast please,” He orders when the waiter approaches.

The ceiling fan in light brown spins steadily. The engine gives out several soft clicking sounds. The radio is boardcasting one of Inspector Lee's favourite songs.

“Everyone would like to lead a good life; Every family has a difficult prayer...”¹

Poon Sau King has been one of Inspector Lee's all time favourite Mandarin singers. Her singing seems to understand people's plight. Yes, indeed, every family has a difficult prayer...

“...If you would like to lead a good life, you shall not commit misdeeds. Do not rely on money, that will hamper good relationships...”

Inspector Lee let out a snort. Yes, one should not rely on money, but without money, one basically gets nothing. Can you be fed by love and good relationships?

He is taking a sip of his coffee when a woman walks into the restaurant and stands next to him. Inspector Lee does not look up. He indicates the seat opposite him.

That is a young woman.

She is slender, nice-looking and well-groomed. Her long hair wrapped by a pink silk scarf, which goes along well with her one-piece dress in white. Wearing a big pair of sun glasses, one cannot see her eyes, but can still tell from her figures that she is a pretty young lady. She is carrying a suitcase that looks just like Inspector Lee's.

“Need to order anything?” Inspector Lee puts down his cup of coffee.

¹ The song is “家家有本難念的經”(Every family has a difficult prayer) by 潘秀瓊 (Poon Sau King), who was a renowned singer in the 50s.

She sits, resting her suitcase on her lap.

“No thanks. This should be fast.”

“Up to you. So you’ve brought the money?”

The white dress fits the woman well. Inspector Lee finds that the dress shows her curves beautifully. Her slightly plumping bosom is leveling just above the restaurant table.

“Of course.” The woman hands Inspector Lee her suitcase. “Check if you wish.”

Inspector Lee laughs lightly. He picks up his toast.

“Why make it a hurry? Tell me, how did you do it?” Lee takes a bite on the toast.

“Since when did you start paying attention to little details? Well,” The woman leans back with a smile, “Just got it before I left the house that day.”

“How?” Inspector Lee asks with interests.

“It’s simple. Her timetable can be easily figured out. She isn’t that kind of person who would change plans just on the spot. So how hard is it to figure the location and password out when she’s away?”

“So you made the call?”

“An easy one, with the voice changer.”

“And the deposit?”

“Chen isn’t as smart as I thought,” the woman crosses her long flawless legs, then continues, “He believes me right away when I told him the diamond worths HK\$10,000,000...”

“Wooo... But you’re naughty, right? Telling him just one-fifth of the true price?”

The woman smiles.

“Not gonna lose too much after all, right? It would be too much a pity if the fortune falls in his hands, or, the charity.” She snorts.

“Sure. She didn’t even intend to leave a penny for you on her testament, huh?”

She did not reply.

Inspector Lee leans forward and breaks the silence, “And I can’t deny that it is quite a brilliant idea that he has no excuse when HK\$10,000,000 is really deposited into his account and he is indeed the one contacting buyers.”

The woman giggled. She leans forward, too, sliding her sunglasses frivolously to the tip of her nose, her finger tip is well-polished. She looks fearlessly into Inspector Lee’s eyes. “Or who does he think he’s tackling with?”

They laugh.

Inspector Lee opens the lock of the suitcase. He peeps into it, then re-lock the suitcase.

“This should be alright. After so many transactions, you are a trustworthy partner to me.”

The woman stands to leave.

“Hey Debby, tea next time?”

“Let’s think about it.”

She throws one last smile to Lee.

The sound of her heels echoes with the song on the radio.

The Day

by Karen Kwok

Mr. Lee turned on the computer screen and opened a blank file. He glanced behind, the blinds in front of the boss's office were pulled down, the boss was still enjoying his coffee and the morning paper. Mr. Lee knocked on the keyboard swiftly. The stock market had just started, the whole screen was covered with numbers and lines in blue and red. The tsunami had washed away half of the wealth, the market was boring. Mr. Lee hastily rolled down a few pages and closed the window. It was nothing like the old days now, he thought, just to mention last year, when the stock market was prosperous and the whole world was blooming, every single colleague in the office was checking on the floating prices at working hours, righteously, everyone was staring at the screen like a dog slobbering in front of its bone before the master said "Now, eat." No one worried of the possibility that the boss may poked his nose out of his office, on gambling in the stock market, he was even busier than you were! But for now, if anyone dared to work on the stocks in the office, he or she could simply check on it for the whole day at home tomorrow and possibly many days afterward. Sweeping around the office, everyone was burying their heads in work. Not that they were really busy, actually it was just the opposite, as the company has lost half of its business in the past few months. But nothing was more dangerous to be idle under the current situation, no matter how unimportant it was, one would better do some clicking or typing, or one way to do was to open an old file and retype it again. People complaining about being too busy would wish they never have known how difficult it was to be busy in doing nothing all

the time.

Mr. Lee dully starred at the blank Microsoft Word file, calculating in his heart how much he had lost. He was an optimistic person. He said to himself that it was just natural to be one out of the whole world of people who were losing money. He was being lucky that he still kept his job which was the best thing you could have in the worst time. He thought quietly to himself that he was a smart guy afterall. The decision to invest in the stock market was a right one, it was way better than to see your hard earned money devaluing everyday in the bank. He had lost quite painfully during the economic downturn in 1998 and had learnt a lesson. For the next few years, he and his wife kept on going to free investment talks which were fairly good, considering as a weekend leisure activity. After some times, he, like most of the people in the city, could now casually give talks on the topic in front of friends and family like an expert. Just lacked a little bit of luck, he usually concluded his speech with this sentence. But then, he thought, when his children were grown, they would understand the reason for their father to put the money he had been working his tail off for on the dearly loved No.5 son. Who on the earth but them would inherit all these in the future? To think deeply, he was not losing it all for nothing, he had faith in the future.

Time passed quickly in random thoughts, it was nearly lunchtime now. Mr. Lee went to the Hong Kong style “Good Eat café” across the road with his colleagues as usual. No one knew when the price of a two-courses-rice had risen from twenty dollars something to over thirty dollars. Mr. Lee’s shirt was wet by the hot sun at noon, he loosen his tie and decided to pay the extra two dollars. One shouldn’t be too harsh on himself, he thought. Above their heads, the TV was showing the half-day summary of the stock market in the morning

session. The Hong Kong stock market kept lingering in a low level. Some experts suggested that it was a good chance to invest while some warned people to be careful. Mr. Lee also gave his speech to his colleagues, "I always tell you there is a golden moment! Here it is! This is the golden moment." The group who were eating their two-courses-rice began to discuss vigorously until someone finally glanced at his watch and they paid the bill in rush.

Back to the office, everyone had a hope of the boss being out, so when they saw his big belly stuck before the desk of the reception lady, there were silent sighs of disappointment in their own stomachs. Mr. Lee stealthily checked the starting point of the afternoon session. He only had the time to attend for his No. 5 Son, still dropping. Mr. Lee was an honest person. His saving habit had been formed ever since he started working and he saved every bit of money he could in daily expenses. When he had formed a family of his own, he started investing. Never had he risked his shares like gamblers did, yes, he did take his chances at times, but his most convincing investment was still his trustful No. 5 Son. True as well for many Hong Kong people, the 0005 HSBC shares had a special place in Mr. Lee's heart. Maybe it was the attractive interest that was released every season which made them felt like a real shareholder of a big company. Or it may be the sense of security based on the steadiness of the share, true, it grew slowly but it seldom disappointed them as well. Or maybe it was the long history of the bank in the city that made it a buddy of Hong Kong despite the fact that it was actually a British bank. It was these practical and psychological reasons that have developed into a kind of HSBC complex among Hong Kong people to the extent that they called the stock their No. 5 Son. A son for them to rise and would in return support them when they were old one day. May be it is really

the golden chance, Mr. Lee thought. He thought of the little amount of savings in the bank account, maybe that was the sum of money he could use to gain back all the lost in this financial tsunami. But should I use up the last saving of the family? Mr. Lee hesitated. After the years he had been investing in the stock market, he started to realize little shareholders, like him, are actually losing their money in most of the time. He had bought the HSBC share at its highest price \$150 and it continued to drop till \$50 today. Should he still trust his beloved No.5 Son? "I have trust in the Hong Kong stock market. Everything is stable and fine." He remembered Lee Ka Shing said this on TV a few days ago. In Hong Kong, every parent must have encouraged their children to work hard by saying that, "Even Lee Ka Shing was a worker making plastic flowers before he became the richest man in Asia!" If Lee Ka Shing still trusted Hong Kong, why not me? Mr. Lee made his decision to take the good price today.

The boss usually had more time to supervise his staff after lunch. The office would be busy for an hour or so and then finally the boss would shrink back to his room again. Mr. Lee finally got the chance to enter his online account and check the price once more. He typed in all the necessary information and approached to the confirm page. Mr. Lee heard the boss' office door opening, he felt his heart beating fast. Yes or no? He hesitated again. "The stock will rise again, it is Hong Kong, and even tsunami can't drown us!" Mr. Lee clicked the confirm button when saying this in his heart. He tried hard to suppress the excitement on his face when his boss measured him with a strange glance.

All were dealt with and done, he sank back in his chair, what he could do now was to wait for sometime. The family had to be a bit frugal recently, Mr. Lee felt sorry. But last year when things were on

their track, he finally took action and brought the family to Disneyland at last. Of course it was the Hong Kong Disneyland. It was a bit tiring for him to run after the two kids for the whole day after having worked till late the night before, he was not young now, but it was a happy family day after all. That night he and his wife sat on the ground to take a place for watching the firework when the kids were looking at souvenirs in the shops. Spending a few hundreds dollars on a doll was beyond the reach of the generosity of Mr. Lee but those souvenir copper coins which cost ten dollars each were interesting though. Inserting a ten-dollar-coin into the machine and you could choose a cartoon figure to be pressed on the copper coin. The kids asked for more after playing once, so he finally gave them fifty dollars to enjoy themselves. They were holding a couple of pretty copper coins in their hands when they came back and asked their father to choose one as a gift from them. So Mr. Lee chose the Mickey Mouse, the only recognizable figure to him. The firework started when he was looking at the mouse's smiling face. BomBomBom! The firework pierced the darkness, shining the sky bright, in Hong Kong, there were beautiful fireworks burning in the sky every night.

Mr. Lee glanced at the clock on the wall and yawned. It was nearly the end of today's work. His wife had just called to ask him to buy a bottle of soy sauce on his way home. "Remember to buy the Amoy brand, that's made in Hong Kong, never trust those made in mainland." His wife reminded him. "Ah ye, can you buy a pack of Popsicle sticks in stationery shops as well? Your son needs it for tomorrow's art lesson." What ...Popsicle sticks? Mr. Lee thought. When he was small, the kids would be happy for the whole day to have an ice-licolly to eat and now they were asking for a pack of Popsicle sticks to do art work, the schools nowadays were really strange. But

then he thought, people said they now needed diversified development, IQ, EQ, AQ...so many Qs that he could never understand. That was true though, all he was doing now were just for the humble wish to see the children going to university one day, so they would not need to work their whole lives just for maintaining their living like their father. All the stocks and funds were bought for them, maybe for them to study abroad or maybe for their wedding, just a budget prepared for whenever they needed it. As for his own retirement plan, Mr. Lee seldom thought about it, he was confident that with his own hands he would not starve himself nor needed any assistance in this place called Hong Kong.

It was tea time, a colleague had brought some egg tarts for tea, the atmosphere in the office became more relax as approaching the end of the day. Everyone stood around holding an egg tart and the topic of the rise and fall was started again. "There are rumors that HSBC will drop to \$35!" A colleague said to Mr. Lee with a sense of pride, "I think this is what we call a real golden moment." "Nonsense!" Mr. Lee replied dismissively, "It once worth a hundred and fifty! How can anyone push it down to thirty-five dollar? All nonsense!" "Why are you so annoyed? Don't tell us you've just brought in a load of HSBC!" The group burst into laughter. Mr. Lee pretended that he didn't hear anything and cursed the colleague who had a big mouth. With a full-mouth of egg tart, Mr. Lee thought in what way he should tell his wife about his recent investment. Even though she had no resistance in investing in the stock market, it was still difficult to predict her reaction after knowing all the saving had now used on the HSBC. One can never know what a woman really think!

It was so lucky that the boss had left early. The office was like an unlocked zoo. There were people reading magazines and surfing

the net. Some had even started to pack. It was 4:10 p.m., just five minutes from the closing of this trading day. Mr. Lee was watching a live commenting stock program online. Several colleagues gathered around his computer. The two female program hosts were chatting some rumors about the market. Suddenly a loud confusing fuss burst from the earphone. “HSBC had dropped to \$37!” Exciting comments were bubbling from the earphones and the colleagues standing around him. Mr. Lee licked his lips. He tried to ignore them and clear his nervous mind. “It was just a minor fluctuation.” he repeated the words in his heart. The clock were flashing on the lower right-hand corner of the computer screen, “Only a minute is left till the closure of this trading day” Mr. Lee was annoyed by the exaggerated comments. “Hey, the big bankers must have earned much today.” “Hong Kong is the city of the rich. Lee Ka Shing has got our land, our flats, our supermarket. And his son got our telephone lines! Even the university is now under his name.” A colleague hit Mr. Lee’s chest by his elbow. “Come on, Mr. Lee, how much had you earned today?” Mr. Lee hoped that they would shut up. On the screen, the background of stock agents wearing their red jackets running around like ants in a hot pot made a confusing picture. “It is well-known that big investors aim at the in the last minute of the day and make big fluctuation of the price, will there be further drop?”, the program host said. Rose from Mr. Lee’s heart, a prayer, which was almost a begging, was asking to be a humble citizen living a normal life. Another colleague came by and whistle to the low price. “I wonder if it will really drop to \$33.” Thirty seconds left, Mr. Lee decided to sell out all the shares he had brought today whenever the price was better tomorrow no matter how stupid it sounded. Twenty seconds ... Mr. Lee started to relax, finally. Then, it seemed that the whole world was freeze for a moment. Things happened so fast that no

one reacted at first. The bell rang for announcing the end of the trading day. The program host, the colleagues and Mr. Lee himself stopped in confusion. Then everyone in this office, in the live show, in the Stock Exchange Centre, and the whole city of Hong Kong exploded. "It's thirty-three dollar!!" All people in the office came around to see what happened, Mr. Lee was drown by the crowd on his seat. "I'm speechless..." One of the host 's eyes were reddened. "HSBC had dropped for 25% in five seconds. I'm speechless." Another host shook her head when patting on her partner's shoulder. All are exclaiming their shock. A young colleague murmured how much he had lost. Mr. Lee was silent. He sank in his chair with reddened eyes. A real loser is one who could not say his lost out loud. All were gone in five seconds, all were now in the rich men's pockets. He should have known Lee Ka Shing was no longer a working class hero but one of the rich who preyed on the market. Mr. Lee thought of his empty bank account, he should have known.

"Hey guys, big news!" the boss's secretary came around and shouted. "Is there any news bigger than this?" A colleague pointed on the computer screen. "Listen," the secretary whispered, "I heard that the company is going to lay off people! The boss had prepared the "big envelops on his desk already!" The groups, terrified, all turned around to the boss's office. Mr. Lee raised his head. The office was blinding in white fluorescent lights. Then he remembered, that strange stare by which the boss measured him earlier in the afternoon... Through the dusted glass of the boss's office, Mr. Lee could almost read his own name on one of the white envelopes lying on the desk. The phone rang, showing on the screen the word "home". A sudden feeling mixed with shame, anguish and betrayal rose from the man's heart, not only for himself but for his family, for his children waiting their father home.

Doubt

by Tim Tam Yin Fai

It was an ordinary school day. Everything was routine, from brushing my teeth, wearing my school uniform, to taking the same bus and attending the same morning assembly. The clean faces at the entrance of my secondary school were familiar – the same eagle-eyed prefects scanning the length of our hair, the style of our shoes, as well as the absence, or more exactly, presence of our accessories. It was so early that dew on the trees of the school garden was not yet dried out, but almost every one of us, with wrinkled foreheads, raised eyebrows and ever-bending backs, had to drag our bodies into the school campus for the morning talk.

Near the school garden’s white pebbles of what my headmaster repeatedly called them as “the gravity of love and care” – the resting place of our parents – sat a group of murmuring parents. As my best friend, Mary, always said, “this is an advertising zone where the school never has to pay for their flattery. One parent said, “This school is a Christian school; every teacher has to be a Christian convert in order to teach here. Your children are in great care!” Another said, “So are yours!” I always wondered if they ever chatted with one another; I just felt that they were making solo speeches to glorify a school that they had not truly experienced or closely looked at.

Stepping into my shabby classroom, the topics of our conversations were within expectation. Our minds were overwhelmed either by the tests yesterday or the future ahead, that was, to choose the art or science stream. Along with the heavy talks were the scattered flipping of pages and the repeated ticking of the clock. It seemed to

me as if my classmates were merely machines reading those study materials when their eyeballs gravitated only towards the line on which they were reading. Nothing could divert their attention away from the textbooks except when the class monitor hinted that the class teacher, Ms Tang, was walking in. The whole class immediately sat upright and softened the corners of their sleeves. There was a dead silence: a suppressed impulse to stand up and “salute”, though we always had to wait until she greeted us. During that very moment, only the sound of the wind and the flutter of the leaves were heard. Even her usually heavy smile would only add horror to our emotions. The white, thick substances covered on her face, combined with two slightly red circles right above each corner of her purple lips, reminded us only about the serious, or in her words, “professional” attitudes that she wished to promote in the lesson.

Minutes after the lesson began, Ms Tang pronounced her words very clearly, “Mister Yeung. Get back to your seat and stop bothering Ms Horan please.” Despite her back turned against us, I noticed the reflection of Ms Tang’s eyes gazing at us through the glass on the top right corner of the wall. We could only sense the thick air of dead silence and fear and utter no words. As usual, she continued by offering a routine solid speech to encourage us to study even harder for the sake of our future. She did that without bending her head or body forward a little to listen to what we wanted to say. In her mind, our faces were ignored, difficulties excluded, and souls unseen. We were not even allowed to do what we wanted. “Who on earth invented the notions of education and school?” I wondered. My mind was locked inside this question until the bell rang for lunchtime.

After lunch, it was finally unusual. As an assembly was scheduled for every Friday afternoon, we positioned ourselves

accordingly and flocked to the hall with light footsteps. Upon entering the hall, Ms Tang appeared and surged into the center of our queuing lines. She raised her head, stared upwards, and warned, “Make no noise. Behave like a student. Any chattering or sleeping will receive my greatest attention.” But we immediately sensed something different once we entered the hall. It was usually dim, with teachers standing along the two sides of the hall and noises coming from the operation of the ventilators. But the guest who stood right in the middle of the stage caught the centre of attention. He gently held both of his fists in a way that resembled a kind old man speaking his words of wisdom. He was a middle-aged man already going bald. This feature drove us to chuckle as the childish innocence deep inside our minds associated that with the Mediterranean Sea, which was an old joke that we used to tease at the baldness of our stubborn Geography teacher. Perhaps, that was what we all longed for — using our imagination to do whatever we wanted without necessarily adhering to some meaningless restraints. His moustache also looked lively, flowing with the wind inside the hall yet always bouncing back to its original position. Our standard hair, however, was always fixed in the same position. Above all, his eyes were so crescent-shaped that he seemed to smile at us all the time, a smile that contained warmth, understanding, and love that had always remained distant from us. Not long after, we knew the topic of the assembly, that is, the understanding of Jesus Christ as well as Christianity.

“...You have the right to ask a girl dance; she has the right to turn you down. What if they all turn you down? Oops, that’s why I am standing here as a priest! That’s an old funny joke...” After a long humorous talk by the guest speaker, it was all down to the moment of truth – the request for conversion to Christianity. At that time, the hall

was so silent and the audience so attracted that the speaker seemed to possess the ability to communicate with our souls. The light turned dim so the faces of my teachers or even classmates were hidden in darkness. The whole surrounding was black — no Ms Tang’s upright posture, no clear division of seats according to classes, no nothing. Only the bald head of the priest had the light. It made me so excited and relieved that I was no longer under any surveillance, and that for the first time in my life I seemed to be able to choose personally and for my own sake, as if a person who had lost his consciousness and suddenly recovered and found a completely different world. “Now, close your eyes... For those who are willing to lay your worries and burden on Jesus Christ and be his follower, raise your hand.” Slowly, the priest requested for three times.

I did not raise my hand at the first attempt. Even with my eyes shut, I felt that my classmates were eyeing me in a secret manner and would laugh at my “submissive” personality. The spontaneous rubbing of fingertips, vibrating shrieks of moving chairs, far-stretching sputters of the curtains, and above all, low scattered voices of chattering came from everywhere in the hall. What was that wooden smell, that oily odor? Was it from Peter’s belt, from Tom’s hair jell? Were they listening to the talk? Or would they be watching their friends like me? After all, resorting to religion was considered a sign of weakness and dependence. A great many questions were flowing like a waterfall in my mind. Would they laugh at my decision? Was I a fool in their eyes? Would my parents be told of the conversion? Above all, after I became a Christian, would they demand absolutely model behavior from me? In this case, I would escape from one jail cell and end up falling into another, a cell that required perfect, or so-called, Christian-like behavior. I was absolutely stuck. The speaker made no noise, waited

patiently, and remarked, “God loves you.” “God loves you.” I tried to fake a cold smile that showed disdain for such form of persuasion. But my friends nearby did not move or reply. I came to the realization that my attitude was so stupid. I did not have to care about others. Yes, God was not merely a feeling or an emotion. God offered perfect love, without selfishness or fear but concern for others. With this assurance, my body seemed to become lighter since I knew that I, as a subject, was cared about and taken care of. My worries would also be His worries, so I was not alone anymore to confront the problems in everyday life.

A sharp, low voice came from the left hand side of my seat, “Tom, concentrate! Or you will have to hand in handwriting of the school rules on the student’s handbook, legible, ten times.” The thick odor of Ms Tang’s dizzy perfume leaked from the awkward movement of her shoulders. Such was a sign of her anger — we were told. I had my doubts. If God was a fountain of love, and if Karmel was a Christian school with all Christian teachers, then why hadn’t I felt God’s love before this emotional talk?

“God is the beginning of wisdom. Raise your hand, and let Him take care of all your worries and troubles.” I had never heard such a beautiful rhythm. Each of his pauses and his stresses pierced my heart as they resembled the numerous morning talks of our teachers as they, with bright eyes and nodding heads, said in similar tone, “most of my students who passed through the public examination were Christians. God will reward every single minute that you spend on reading the Bible. Your worries will be God’s worries.” Eloquent speech as it was, my round white face somehow blushed after hearing it. I felt guilty — feeling the kind of embarrassment burning in our heart when we talked to our parents only in the hope that they could give us a bit more extra pocket money. I could never do that. I would not want to

become a Christian only if it could help me deal with the examinations by giving me a bit extra confidence. But I needed that confidence. I did not know.

Neither did I raise my hand at that second attempt. Upon deeper reflection, I was rational enough to admit that every religion required robust commitments. This, in my perception, was at odds with the prospects for my future, which required a huge investment of time and effort to study. But then the priest pressed his head forward, looked around and quietly remarked, “feel, just feel what you want most. Let your heart guide you, not your head. You just cannot think too much when it comes to religion.” These were words of wisdom that I never heard from my black-suit-clad Christian teachers. They would constantly exercise their authority and expect us to act according to certain rules or norms. But, indeed, I never had to think too much. I did not realize when I had fallen into the constant trap of hesitation — when a decision had to be made, initially I could not stop moaning and groaning in a deep, low volume, then my mouth would refuse to speak, and my black eyeballs would be gazing nowhere like a dying old man in despair.

The dimness of the surrounding made me feel drowsy. Shutting my eyes, a picture surged through my mind and I saw a sharp chain of cobweb-like beacons flickering above a sandy coast. The beams lit the whole surrounding and gave all creatures a sense of direction. I was not sure if it was mere imagination or the feelings of the presence of God in my heart, but I did not have to care. I felt that He had always been with me, adding to my strength to be a stronger person and, above all, be myself. All I knew was that with God, I could just do my best without any worries or fear of failure. My ultimate rewards would be in heaven. Despite my “to-be-not-to-be” indecisiveness, my

body felt an intense heat, my heart uncontrollably pounding and fists clenching. I was waiting for an outburst of my deepest emotion like a river expecting the imminent turn of a waterfall.

The priest stopped talking, but the sound of his approaching footsteps suggested that he had walked down the stage and was leisurely strolling into the audience. Though we were supposed to keep our eyes closed, I felt the itching of my left eye so I had to scratch it hard. And I peeped through numerous identical heads of my classmates and spotted his presence. Under the dim light that scattered around the hall, his bald head never hid his presence. “Raise your hand and come out. Let us celebrate the joy in God’s embrace. And, choose for yourself.”

Yes. Choose for yourself. The words were simple but firm. Suddenly, my mind was filled with all my experiences with and understandings of this religion – many of the great artists, politicians, and even leaders were Christians, most Christians were happier, and the like. These thoughts might be silly in making a tremendous decision, but who cared? It was everything needed to make a choice! My hands were no longer trembling, and I started doubting the forces that pulled me back from doing what I really wanted. At that moment, I was never so aware of the lapse of time, especially when it slipped away so quickly and uncontrollably that I had no idea of when it would take away the decisions that I could have actually made. And I knew that it was my final chance. I was quite sure that the Lord had guided me to this scene, and that I would cruelly disappoint Him if I were to let slip of this opportunity. I felt an urge to raise my hand, like a surge of tide, so natural and strong. And I did not wait for the priest’s call. I just pressed forward to the stage. The burning desire was like the turn of a waterfall, which would fall down quickly and naturally by gravity,

just as it is a basic instinct for children to choose, not to submit, and to create, not to follow.

After the assembly, I did not chat with anymore. I stood near the pebbles of the school garden, gazing at the small field where many coconut-sized birds were pressing their pint-sized mouths to the ground in search of insects. They did not think too much; they just felt, by instinct, that there was food, and they clustered around the small garden.

The Unforgivable Culprit

by Andy Lam Wai Kwong

Dozens of reporters cram at the small gateway of the court, thrusting and pushing, shouting and swearing — just to find the best position for a good picture. They have been waiting for the whole morning and have not taken even a single picture. Suddenly they stop — a figure staggers out of the court.

Tens of cameras all point at the same direction at the same time, under the flashes, the dim afternoon becomes a bright sunny day. The pale face of the figure is now even paler. Staring at his own feet, the man walks steadily towards the exit. But the reporters won't let him go easily – they surround him and try to suck him into their own cameras. Under the cameras, the man, is like a prey under the aims of rifles, has no power to resist at all.

He stops.

The reporters can hardly follow this unusual moving pattern and nearly fall while the man slowly turns his head and gazes at somewhere — not far away, several people are standing, looking back with eagle-eyes — They are the families of the dead. The man walks towards them while keeping his head lowered.

He kneels down.

Everyone is startled by the man's sudden act and they can hardly respond to it but by taking photos. The white light still flashes on the man as if he was a superstar under the spotlight. The incisive sights of those people are stabbing at the man though the man dares not look at them. These merciless people are now surrounding him, looking down at him like judges going to certify a death sentence on a cruel murderer.

‘I am sorry.’

Words burst out from the mouth of the man as if they are reflexive act. But the words hit on the wall and strikes back at him.

‘What do you mean by sorry? It’s nothing — it’s all useless now!’

The man still believes there is a slim chance that his apology will be accepted.

‘I am terribly sorry.’

‘What is the use of saying sorry now! Five lives! You have taken away five precious lives. They were all the breadwinners of their families. What could your ‘sorry’ do to these people and families.’

‘I know I was wrong. I am really sorry...’

‘Gave me back my son and their fathers, I would then forgive you!’

‘I am sorry ...’

The man continues kneeling there and stares at their feet. He can give no reply as he knows he can really do nothing for them at all.

‘Let’s go now.’ The families turn their backs to the man. ‘Ignore this bastard and let him kneel till he has repented enough for his sin.’ And they stride away while the withered silhouette is still kneeling on the ground. The flashlight still shines on the man despite how expressionless the man’s face is; and the reporters won’t let their prey leave easily — not until it is dismembered and dyed red by blood.

The man leaves the court and wanders about the street. He has nowhere to go and there is nowhere he can go — he is spotted wherever he goes — everyone around him stares at him as if they had seen a monster, an alien.

I do not belong here.

Every stare pierces at him right at his left chest. Since the accident, he has been living under surveillance — his every word, every movement is recorded and broadcasted from day to night.

Whenever he walks through whatever street, he can't stop feeling someone is tracing his steps, lurking at the corners, shooting him. He is a wounded little bird which cannot defend himself but can only hide away.

The door opens. The withered silhouette follows the beams of light into the darkness and is pulled into somewhere the light cannot reach. It is a place he knows he should be familiar with — it has a somewhat familiar smell, a sense of familiarity, like an old friend you have not seen for years — he tries to search for every part of his brain and struggles to recollect pictures and scenes that once happened here but, he failed: he can't even remember even a single trace of it. Everything just seems cold and distant.

He does not belong here.

He tries hard and manages to find his bed. Without taking off the shoes, he just falls onto the bed and sleeps. He is exhausted and he has not slept well for the past whole month. Every time he closes his eyes, the same picture haunts him and it is too much to his sense that he has to open his eyes again. And every time he opens his eyes, his eyelids involuntarily shut again by the overwhelming tiredness. The cycle of opening and closing usually recurs a hundred and twenty eight times a night before he can just get into a light doze. If he is lucky, his doze will last till the day-break and he will have another struggling day; if he is unlucky, he will wake up at the middle of the night, facing the everlasting repentance that shackles him till the end of his life. And tonight is another unlucky night.

The moment of crashing keeps recurring — the merry newly-wed couples in jubilation, the long curved white lines on the road, two elongated dots of light, the out-of-controlled wheel, the overturned lorry, the squashed taxi and the six ... — ‘No!’ he screams. He straightens his body and his eyelid springs open with his eyeballs protruding out. Panting and puffing, he is lost in his own labyrinth of thoughts and he tries to find out where he is.

Slowly, his breathes are smoothed. The hunger to gasp air languishes and calmness is casted on him again. The silence of the room grows larger and larger and its noises fill both his ears — the clicking and ticking, the dripping of water and the blowing of the wind — No, he hears something else; something that is hidden in the silence. Words? They do not sound like any language — is it a kind dialect that has not been heard before? He cannot sure but it is at least not one he can recognize. But Wait! Listen more carefully! It is more like a moaning — a moaning of a woman... A woman! The man widens his eyes and sees a woman standing in front of him.

He has nearly forgotten her as he has not seen her for months since the accident. He wants her stay at the back of his mind forever and never comes to him again — He has not the courage to see her, to touch her, to embrace her, to kiss her or simply to talk to her, and to tell her what has happened.

The man looks at the woman more carefully and he sees a little girl — surely he knows her — she is his daughter. The man cannot imagine how his daughter would treat him if she knew her father is a murderer — A Murderer! Can he still hold her in his arms while this pair of hands is full of blood; can he still carry her on his back while his shoulders are already subjugated by guilt; can he still stand straight and face the world, the people, his family and — himself. He lays his

hands open on his laps. This pair of reliable hands has been feeding him since he left his home and now they betray him; this pair of coarse hands has gone through so much rigor with him and now they are tired of struggling. This pair of hands, now, can do him nothing but to cover his face and to hold his tears.

He has been deciding whether he should make the decision. Now, he thinks it is the only way to let everything go. His heavy body is reluctant to move though his mind is determined. 'I have had enough of it,' the man tries to persuade himself. 'Enough!' One more day — No! One more second is already too much to bear. There is only one way to get through — dea... — the man dares not to think of the word: it is too heavy for him.

Everything is set up: a chair, a rope and a man on the rope. One step forward and everything will come to an end. The only thing that he can't let go is his family — his wife and his daughter — they will have to depend on themselves ever after. Suddenly, the flashlight comes again and he sees tens of reporters stand in front of him, taking photos of him and he can barely open his eyes. The silent room becomes nosier and nosier and a blending of different tones of voices amplifies slowly. The sounds become clearer and clearer and they are men and women accusing him. The man presses his hands over his ears and tries to stop listening.

Stop it!

He steps forward and the chair falls on the floor making a loud noise.

The dark room suddenly turns into a dazzling whiteness. This whiteness slowly swirls and forms a tunnel. The swirl accelerates and

it is all dark again.

‘Open your eyes... open them!’ The man opened his eyes and found that he was in a celebration. There were many people and he could recognize some of them.

‘You have woken up finally! Big Brother! You have just fainted away after drinking my precious rice wine,’ a red-faced man came near and said; obviously he has drunk a lot. ‘Come on, big brother! Let’s drink it till we can’t stand up anymore.’

He raised up his little glass cup high and splits of transparent liquid flew out of the cup. Slowly they fell on the man’s face like drops of rain. The action, as if it was slowed down, was so vivid.

I must have seen this sometime before.

The laughter, the wine, the dishes, the newly-wed couples... ‘Yes! I remember it! It is the night before the accident.’

He remembered this strong smell of wine which seeped from the surroundings and also his body — it was the sign of the accident — and he would never forget it.

‘Big brother, Come on drink it!’ The red-faced man gave him a glass cup of wine.

‘I will not make the same fault twice.’ The man murmured to himself while taking up the cup.

‘Good! That’s our big brother!’ the other man shouted.

Among the joyfulness, a sense of glumness was hiding and alert. After innumerable cup-raising, almost all the guests there had fallen into ecstasy by the enchantment of the wine while the man, who had been struggling throughout the celebration, was the only one staying out of the jubilation.

After the celebration, the man got back to the hotel. ‘There is

still four hours before the accident. I need to wake myself up in these remaining hours.’ The man thought. He got to the kitchen and found a bag of ice in fridge. Then, he poured the ice into the bathtub and filled it with cold water. He immersed himself into this coldness — wishing he wouldn’t repeat the same fault twice.

He closed his eyes, tried not to think of anything. He had never been a good thinker nor did he even like the feeling of meditation; but at this moment, his thought seemed, the first time, to be quenched and fell into a state of sub-consciousness.

The coldness was not a stabilizer; it was instead agitating him — every pore on his skin was pinned and it ached like being bitten by thousands of ants at the time; He could not move as the slightest movement of his body was like cleaving his joints.

A little blue bird stopped at the window and cried in an unusual high pitch — it was the sign of daybreak. The man quickly rose from the bathtub and got dressed. It was the only one chance he had to change his own destiny.

He got on his own lorry, turned the key and was ready to go. The same road was already paved in front of him, awaiting his repentance.

The two long curved white lines on the road leading him to the twisting point of his life, turning his life upside down, destroying his family, ruining the precious hours of him staying with his wife and daughter.

He recognized it — the wheel started to be out-of-control and the same taxi was just going behind him. The wheel tilted to the left and he was getting closer and closer to the barrier.

No! It won’t happen again!

The man shouted while he turned the wheel quickly to the right. The lorry hit the right road-barrier and got over-turned. The taxi following it just escaped the truck in the last moment and got only a slight damage.

The lorry was overturned and was in a heavy damage. The police, together with the ambulance, arrived in a few minutes. They tried hard to rescue the driver of the lorry and managed to pull him of it. The driver was hurt seriously and was bleeding all over his body. The driver was certified on his way to the hospital.

The news issued the other day was titled, 'BRAVE DRIVER SACRIFICED HIMSELF AND SAVED SIX LIVES'.

Missing Person Search

by Tina Zhong Tianya

I am Yan, 22 years old, male, working as a Chinese Teacher in Tao Yuan Municipal Secondary, Hu Nan Province, (post code: 451700). I'm looking for my son. His name is Wang Ming, 12 years old. Yes, there's no mistake. I have a 12-year-old son.

Tao Yuan is the city I'm in. I came from Beijing — don't ask me *Whys*, I've had them enough. My fellow graduates couldn't understand why a native Beijing resident would leave for a provincial town. They craved for the permission to stay in that royal city. Their registrations as legal Beijingers expired automatically upon graduation. Why, Beijing is the best city in China, they said.

That's precisely my reason for leaving. I get tired of the 6 orbital motorways coiling around the city, the omnipresent ads saying "The Socialist Society is Harmonious", and all the battles for getting an underground ticket or a job. I need air. This town attracts me with its name: Tao Yuan. It means a kind of Eden in legend. A 3 A.D. poet claimed to have found it, and the most wonderful thing was, he said, that no power existed there. I know it's a silly parable. The real Tao Yuan is a most plain town that you can find in hinter-land China, only with more water, less dust. But it's paradisaical enough for me. The life here is not busy, so I have time for more poetry. Another poet said, try to have lotus in your garden, then you would be as clean as the flower even when growing in mud. I hold my lotus fast. I will not let myself sink down.

That morning, when the principal sent his secretary for me, I was standing outside the office with my colleagues. The door handle had come off, and the lock was naked with its gears. We studied the

“wound” carefully and concluded that it was not caused by human force. The oxygenation should be blamed. Someone muttered something about corruption. We were sparked off. The discussion was on the rumour that our principal had taken the money for updating school facilities. I was giving a passionate speech about institutional dishonesty.

So the silence was awkward when the secretary emerged.

“Mr. Principal wants you immediately.”

“If his highness could excuse me, I want him to repair the door immediately.” I thought it was worse to recover from my speech too quickly.

“Watch out, young man. He was not very happy today.”

The secretary was right. Though Mr. Principal was never amiable, he seldom threw things at people’s face.

“Congratulations! An illegal immigrant in your class!”

I picked up the file. It read: “Wang Ming: Proof of Registration”. I was confused: “Isn’t he Chinese citizen?”

“Don’t play the fool, young man. This Wang Ming is not a registered urban resident. He is a peasant-born. Look at the forged documents! The police say he doesn’t even have the permission for temporary stay. Such a forger have been in your class for a month! Haven’t you noticed anything about him?”

I must say I have. It was impossible to ignore the Mr. No. One in all exams. He was a model student in every way, an old-fashioned type too: fearfully hardworking and modest and silent. He was always the first to arrive at school, sitting alone in the corridor, reciting textbooks. I tried once to make him talk about chemistry learning in the class. He denied his talent so fiercely that he almost cried. Oddities? His skin was coarse as if covered with sand. His accent was not quite the same

with others. I thought it as provincial variation.

“What will you do to him, sir?”

“Please mind your words! It’s not me who will do something to him. It is the law. He must go back to his village, as soon as possible.”

“What about his education?”

“He will go to school in his village. Sure! I know you young men. You all think you are the only socialist left on earth. But remember, it’s a problem of SS, social stability. If you don’t solve it soon and well...”

“What?”

“You can lose our jobs. It’s the law. The authority is serious.”

I wish I could tell you how I confronted the threat. But I simply remained speechless, listening to the principal: “... to dispatch, if necessary. Of course, the authority will be very pleased if you can persuade him to leave, happily.”

There’s no ghetto in Tao Yuan. There can’t be.

I didn’t know why I imagined Ming living in a ghetto. In one of the boxes made by pieces of iron, with trash everywhere, smelly, unidentified liquid leaking. I almost enjoyed the picture of Ming reading beside a bin, and a dog poking nose inside the garbage. Perhaps, the more fiercely I tortured my conscience, the less I would be tortured by reality.

When the taxi dropped me in front of an abandoned frozen meat factory, I thought he made a mistake. But the concrete giant was the only building in sight. In the dusk, women selling vegetables at the gate packed the leftovers. Some people came out of the building to pick up the leftover of leftovers. Soon it stroke at me: these stealthy residents needed cover-up instead of a manifesting ghetto.

But how could I find Ming? The interior was a labyrinthine

market. In the huge, undivided former workshop, “apartments” were separated by plastic cloth. Bulbs swayed on the wires in the air, giving out flickering light. Of course there were no room numbers. A woman dragged a stove from behind a cloth, and started the fire.

“Excuse me, do you know...”

I would never forget the woman’s eyes. How could I describe it: distrustful, sharp, or dead? I was seized by the desire to defend myself aloud: I’m not a registration officer! I didn’t wrong you! I’m a good and honest man! How could she look at me as if at a piece of mouldy meat?

The eyes were soon gone. The woman retreated into her “house”. Were others looking at me? I suddenly felt myself besieged in the forest, and the savages hid in the bushes to cast spears. Even as I’m writing now, the chill comes back to me. I’m ashamed. I hear the principal’s words: “problem of social stability”. And I can damn understand them!

I decided to escape. As I hurried to the doorway, a swarm of boys crushed the door open, shouting, waving hands to call the battle charge. The leading boy bumped into me. “Away to the hell!” he muttered.

“Ming?”

We sat around a base table, unable to make conversation, till I said: “Ming, you are going to tear you sleeve apart.”

His hand quivered into a stop, but he still looked obsessively on his sleeve. He was once again the timid model student I knew. I didn’t know the boy who led the “army” and cursed people at full ease. Only the faint redness on his cheeks told me my eyes didn’t lie.

Mrs. Wang, Ming’s mother was a delicately shaped woman; too delicate, perhaps, for a woman of her life. Hard labour had spread

her knuckles, and given her the same sandy skin as Ming's. But her thin shoulder made me doubt how she endured it at all.

"Master Yan," She said in the end, "Is it — is it that Ming did something bad in the school?"

"Mom!"

"No, no. Please don't worry. Ming is an excellent student."

"Oh, Master, you are too kind." I could feel the woman glowing with delight, her face became as red as Ming's, "He is a bad boy, I know. But do be patient with him, master! He doesn't do his homework, and likes playing around with those idle beasts. Unlike those city-born, he can't catch up with the class easily. He doesn't know a word of English — "

"Mom!" Ming sprang up, staring furiously at his mother.

"You rebellious idiot! Can't your mother say a few words about you? Master Yan, forgive him, he is — "

"Please, Mrs. Wang, the thing is much more serious."

Silence fell. The clatter of dishes came into the room from outside. People kept their habit in the countryside — the whole "village" strolled around while having dinner, exchanging gossips. Someone shouted: "So I spat on the ground: you bastard-officer-of-street-management!" Others laughed, several hit the bowl with chopsticks. Mrs. Wang rose up, and began to rummage the room, saying: "Master, it's time for dinner. Do allow me to prepare your dinner!"

"Auntie Wang, listen..."

"Auntie? How old are you, master?" She slowly turned around and put a small bag of instant noodle on the table. She found it in the fridge, apparently a fridge from the refuse dump, serving like a cupboard.

"Why, I'm 22."

“I’m 28.” She said gently.

“The same age of my sister.”

I could say nothing more. Ming walked to his mother’s side. They exchanged a look. Mrs. Wang smiled. I could say nothing more. Pity, bully, and a matter-of-business manner — they must have had them all. I had nothing else to offer. I felt naked. They probably had guessed my purpose from the very beginning. They called me master, yet my shabby face could easily be stripped off.

Mrs. Wang was barely audible: “Master Yan, you don’t have to tell me the law again. I’ve been re-educated many times. Ming’s father got injured in a construction site last year. Without his working certificate, we can’t get the permission for temporary stay, let alone the registration.”

“Why not — ”

“There’s no school in our village. The last teacher left two years ago because the village could no longer afford his salary. But, master, Ming must go to school. I don’t want him to be a peasant like his father and I!”

Mrs. Wang went on: “The forged documents cost us all our savings. I don’t know what gets wrong. A police charged us 7000 yuan. And he said the principal has privately consented.”

“What? Is it true?”

“Urban people like cheating.” Ming broke in abruptly. He paused and give another solemn conviction: “Except Master Yan. Master Yan is kind.”

“Will you help us?”

I didn’t remember whether Mrs. Wang actually uttered the request, or I promised it myself. I said yes. That’s what I regret most now. I don’t regret the promise. I regret the hopeful and confident

tone I used. Even then I knew I was just a powerless school teacher. I took the vow as the visionary lotus, feeling myself again a fearless Confucian.

When I was about to leave, Mrs. Wang asked: “Am I really the age of your sister?”

“Yes. But she is not married.”

“Are you married?”

“I’m not. It’s too early for me to get married now.”

“Take Ming as your son.” Mrs. Wang said, “You can bring him to your family grave yard. Your ancestors will be pleased.”

Ming came to me and bowed. I neither accepted nor refused. I only slapped his shoulder. He winced instinctively, but then smiled. It was the belief in the country that the more male offspring went to the cemetery, the more blessings you could get from ancestors. It was the reward I got from the penniless woman. She offered me her treasure, her son.

Ming got to have some bargaining chips. After a sleepless night, I came up with a fairly good one.

“Put the forged documents on my table. We will destroy them later.” Mr. Principal said behind the bureau without looking at me.

“Sir, I think we’d better not to.”

“Why? These are evidences for illegal engagement. I don’t want to charge the poor boy! Since he has left...”

“I’m afraid he hasn’t.”

Mr. Principal stared at me as if he wanted to pierce me with his eyes: “May I make sure that I understand you properly, Mr. Yan? Do you mean he refused to leave?”

“No, sir. I asked him to stay.”

I gripped the second before the parting of his furious lips: “Sir,

I did it for the sake of the school, and you.”

“What does this mean?”

“Ming is a genius. He has never got scores lower than — ” I opened the transcript I prepared, “Look, he gets full marks in Maths, Chemistry and English; also the best result in Physics and History. Sir, the national centralized exam is coming. Isn’t it always your ambition to beat our rivals? The best student! Full marks in 3 subjects out of 5! It will be the headline, and other principals will never surpass your reputation.”

“It is not my reputation that I concerned. It’s the school’s.” The principal said.

“And your promotion.” I said to myself. I looked down at the principal triumphantly. He sank into the armchair with one hand resting on his belly, examining the transcripts like the greedy landlord in communist posters.

“Incredible results indeed. Only his Chinese...”

“Oh. The boy is made for standardized questions, multiple choices. Scientific minded, I bet. Chinese exam involves too much writing. It’s the only weakness of his.”

“Can I trust you to improve it?”

“Of course, sir. Do you mean, do you mean — ”

“He can stay,” The principal nodded, “upon contract. He must sign a contract with the school, promising to be the first in all three centralized exams. If he fails once, then...”

“Isn’t the pressure a bit too much for a kid?”

The principal shrugged: “That’s the greatest concession I can make.”

I knew that too. Whatever the condition is, to stay is better than to leave, which Mrs. Wang had helped me to see. Returning to

the village means shutting the future outside Ming's world. A future he just gained a glimpse of. So I wasted no time to fetch him.

I didn't expect the meeting to be hopeless. For more than an hour, the principal and I took turns to talk to Ming. He bullied and cursed and hit the table with his fist. I squeezed out all my rhetoric skills, pouring out my projection on his family's suffering, dissolving the seriousness of the contract, and reassuring that he was a genius.

Ming simply sat there like a stone.

"Well," The principal finally lost his patience, "you may go now."

"Please, give Ming a little more time to think it over — "

The principal took a deep breath and shrilled: "I SAID GET OUT!"

The Sexy Mistress

by Veronica Lam

0

What is a mahjong table?

1

‘Ying Kai!’

Woops! Recognizable. It’s grandma calling from the living room, probably asking me to...

‘Come pull the mahjong table out, need to baijosin¹ la!’

Sometimes I can’t help to think how to a mahjong table to be included as a piece of designer furniture— as a male, I would definitely want to hide such a mistress at home. Seductive lady, changeable like clouds in the sky, different flavor day and night. Alluring, appealing, flirtatious when darkness arrives, tempting hands to play over her body, crying out for a game upon her emerald green lingerie. Queen Cleopatra she is, manipulating the consciousness of the players, or are they the prey being played over? So smooth, so soft, so tempting, the hands could not lie off, the game could not stop — as long as the clock could tick until three or four under the dim, yellow light, as long as the players or prey realized they could afford the game no more — no more coins, no more time, no more, no more...

0

What is blood?

1

‘Ying Kai! Fai d² la!’

Woops! I have nearly gone lost with my mistress.

I place my hands over her and delicately covered her with a hemp coat, coarse and dull brown like a wooden board. At daytime,

¹ Pay tribute to ancestors

² ‘Be quick’ in Cantonese

this is how she appears — modest, down-to-earth, diligent, serving the family without glamour, without applause, without attention, as if she was a wooden table; a plain, wooden table.

‘Help hands put the food onto the table la!’ cried grandma.

I hurry into the kitchen and place the tray of food onto the mahjong table. Chicken wings, fried oyster cake, fried fish, shrimps, noodles, but the mahjong table is still my favorite. Serving under the sun; dancing with the stars, I wish I could have a woman like that, a real woman of course, a mahjong table is... still a mahjong table.

‘You forgot to take this out ah!’

Grandma’s voice again. I turn to the kitchen, and can’t help smiling when my eyes reach this lovely figure that brought me up. Grandma walks nearer, but I suddenly feel sick when I see what she is holding — a feather white porcelain bowl, pure, elegant and heavenly, a disgusting contrast with what is holding inside — blood droplets soaked in cotton balls. I smell sorrowfulness.

0

When does everything begin to be a ritual?

1

It’s sweet dumplings again. Grandma makes sweet dumpling every time we baijosin. I have witnessed how she makes them — a fluffy, soft and white dough which looks no different to a huge cotton ball. Then, grandma will pour in red food coloring mixed with water, lucky color for Chinese, but I find the striking red intimidating, especially when it is spread onto the innocent cotton ball, I connect it with unstoppable bleeding blood soaking into the emergency room’s lifeless cotton balls. The dumplings look much more pleasant, however, when grandma blends the red well with the big white dough,

it turns pinkish. Grandma squeezes the rolled dough and the coin-like dumplings come out from her thumb one-by-one. She will then boil them with sugar-water. Taste sweet, but smell sorrowful, every time I see the sweet dumplings I feel sick — I could foresee I am expected to finish them all after the ancestors had their share, it has become part of the ritual.

0

Where is he?

1

‘Aiya! What a pity! Run away treasure la! If only I am patient enough to wait for a few more minutes! That bad stock runs up so high before the market closes! Ah! No eye to see. No chicken to eat today la, son!’

My mother is another lovable character in the family. Whether she won some money from buying stocks, she will bring home a few more drum sticks, sometimes a box of hot egg tarts or Maxim’s assorted cakes. Although buying stocks according to the secret tips (or rumors) about a friend’s friend’s friend’s daughter who was working in i-bank might not be the best deduction method of deciding which stock to buy, I love to see how she is enjoying herself with her friends.

‘Ask Mrs. Chan, Auntie Jan and Ah May over and play mahjong sin.’ Mother said.

Day light is over, the mahjong table has her alluring green lingerie on again. The mahjong table is soon filled with eight hands from four directions, and the air of the room is filled with women’s voices, or well... gossip.

‘Don’t say I don’t give you tips ah! No.393 must go up ga! Cannot not buy ah!’

It is Mrs. Chan, our neighbor. We have been close since I can remember. I stayed with her sometimes when I was small, maybe mother is busy or I forgot my keys, I don't know. But the imagery of a big, hot bowl of sesame oil flavor instant noodles is always clear. That's what the Chans always have — a whole box of sesame oil flavored instant noodles. Mother said Mr. Chan loves it, that's why the Chans have always got it in stock. The Chan has also got a tall pile of newspaper reaching the ceiling of their C15 flat, as if a strong pillar of an old castle. Mrs. Chan works as a waitress in a restaurant and at home, she will stock in the newspaper left by the diners. Sometimes I see Mrs. Chan's son, Billy (who is of similar age as I am), and his little brother, carrying red-white-and-blue nylon woven bags in the corridor waiting for a lift. They did not tell me, but I know it is the newspapers. Mrs. Chan might have asked them to get them cashed in the recycling trade-in store down-stairs. This is one of the functions of having kids, I guess.

I seldom meet Mr. Chan though.

0

Where is she?

1

It's Friday night. It's the ladies' night.

'Wa, Ah May! Unbelievable ar 500 stamps? You bought the whole Wellcome³ mei!'. Mother exclaimed with astonishment.

She must be envying Auntie May, I laugh secretly. Having witnessed her diligence these days in insisting the whole family to get every possible purchase from Welcome, she has collected 348 stamps. I appreciate her articulate calculation and powerful nagging.

'Ha! No way la! I want to fish a golden tortoise to marry me too!' giggled Auntie May with her fist and hands lying on the mahjong

³ Local chain supermarket

table busy counting bank notes she has just won this round, ‘ I ask many people to give me their stamps if they are not interested in redeeming the saucepans!’, Auntie May put down the bank notes and start counting with her fingers, ‘Mrs. Cheung from flat B la, Fat Woman at the corner la, Ah Ping...’

This is the first time I realized the advantage of having a big mouth and an interest of gossiping around. Auntie May knows a lot of people and has probably included everyone on the 7th floor to give her stamps, except...

‘Hey, how about Mrs. Chan? It seems quite some time we haven’t heard from her la...’ Auntie Jan interrupted.

Exactly the same question I have in mind! It has been four months before I last seen Mrs. Chan. I dig my head and eyes into the textbook, my ears alerted, curiously waiting for the mystery to be resolved by this group of women detectives.

‘Oh! Same pattern! Hahaha! I win la finally! ’, Auntie Jan reveals her mahjongs with a sudden force.

‘Your fault la Mrs. Cheng! Why did you pass her that one?’

‘Hey! Why your luck so good today? What did you eat ar?’

Layers and layers of voices interweave with each other. The topic of Mrs. Chan submerges beneath the mahjong table, quietly.

0

What is a good boy?

1

Mother has finally got 500 Wellcome stamps and sent me to redeem the saucepan set. I run along the corridor and stop in front of the lift, besides me is a red-white-and-blue nylon woven bag. Coarsely stuffed, it is roughly shaped into a boastful figure. Alone, standing guardedly in front of the lift, it is expecting someone, Billy and his

little brother, perhaps. I am expecting them too, it has been quite some time since we last met each other. How are they? I wonder. Are they going to get the newspapers cashed in the recycling trade-in store down-stairs?

‘Oh! Ying Kai?’ a thick and heavy hand pads on my shoulder, I turn around and, it’s Billy’s shy, reserved smile, with a pair of solemn eyes. A manifested version of Billy, the well-built man is lifting another red-white-and-blue nylon woven bag with him.

‘Mr. Chan? Oh..... Hi!’ replied by a bird chirp voice, ‘Jo san⁴ ah!’

I am surprised. The soft vocal is not me. I never like talking and I don’t talk. It has always been too embarrassing, too difficult, and too complicated.

‘Long time no see la Ying jai⁵!’ , Mr. Chan drops his red-white-and-blue nylon woven bag, stands still, and then stretches the center of his T-shirt to his forehead, letting it to absorb his perspiration. ‘Did you behave well and listen to your mother?’, he speaks without looking at me and walks into the lift. Sometimes I don’t get it whether people really want to talk or not, but then the image of Auntie May floats into my mind all of a sudden. Just keep on talking and you’ll know a lot of stuff, I tell myself. I follow him afterwards. I am so curious to know how’s Mrs. Chan, it seems she has disappeared.

The lift door closes on the 7th floor.

‘Ah...ah... Are you going to get the newspapers cashed down-stairs?’, I made up my first question.

Mr. Chan is stunned and holds an eye on me for a few seconds, I guess it is the same astonishment as if men had discovered that trees can speak, yet they don’t want to act like they are surprised, for this will be exposing their ignorance. Mr. Chan turns his focus to the red-

⁴ ‘Good morning’ in Cantonese

⁵ Cantonese expression for addressing little boys

white-and-blue nylon woven bags and says, ‘ Ah, no big deal. I am just getting my stuff downstairs.’

The lift door opens on the 5th floor. A young lady walks in with her dog. 5 more floors to go and that is all the time I could have. I am running out of time, but even seriously, I am running out of questions!

‘Why?’ I ask in haste, though feeling stupid, it is the simplest question I could make up.

Mr. Chan turns to his bags and goes silent, then he says, ‘They need to go somewhere else’. Mr. Chan’s voice is so low, so heavy that it condensed and solidified the air of the elevator.

The lift door opens on the ground floor and relieved the tightened air. We greeted each other goodbye and Mr. Chan told me to be a good boy.

0

What are sweet dumplings?

1

She walks nearer, and I finally recognized that she is Mrs. Chan. No sunny smile, no big hellos, no padding my head, but still Mrs. Chan with a loud voice. She walked past me and screamed to the man in front of us carrying two red-white-and-blue nylon woven bags. ‘You quickly disappear! Don’t let me see you again! Go to find your sexy mistress la...’ Mrs. Chan suddenly goes mute as if her voice is stolen.

The man she screams at did not look back, but the dog from the 5th floor did some hard barking. Her soft, tightly-fitted white knitted sweater is coating on her still slightly plump and fluffy figure, somehow making her looks like a scope of pale, dripping vanilla ice-cream — an ice-cream without attractive colorful rainbow sprinkles, alluring hot fudge sauce, nor bee-strung caramel syrup. An ice-cream

scope without toppings, I think, is like a woman without something, it will easily fall into the trap of being a wooden table — without glamour, without applause, without attention. One you would think about it only when you need to baijosin.

I look at her and my pupils seem to have transformed into the Gypsy's crystal ball. Her dripping ice-cream seems to be melting tears. I see draining canned cherries deeply buried in the centre as if it was the heart of the freezing scope. The dark red cherry fillings are powerless to hold themselves. They are pitted. They are vacuumed. They are flattened. They looked mashed. They are helplessly bleeding with bloody red thick liqueur and they are motionlessly soaking themselves in that bloody pond.

A heart rotten into cherry pie fillings is a dessert I learnt that smells more sorrowful than Grandma's sweet dumplings.

0

What is a sexy mistress?

1

Seductive lady, changeable like clouds in the sky, different flavor day and night. Alluring, appealing, flirtatious when darkness arrive, tempting hands to play over her body, crying out for a game upon her emerald green lingerie. Queen Cleopatra she is, manipulating the consciousness of the player, or is he the prey being played over? So smooth, so soft, so tempting, the hands could not lie off, the game could not stop — as long as the clock could tick until three or four under the dim, yellow light, as long as the player or prey realized he could afford the game no more — no more coins, no more time, no more wife, no more children.

I fold my legs onto the sofa and rest my head on my knees, Mr. Chan, Mrs. Chan, Billy and his brother, not to let alone the boxes

of sesame flavored instant noodles. I cannot help having them appear again and again in my crystal ball. Why bother? I concluded that I would just keep a blissful wife at home, a mahjong table too in case I have grown to be a greedy man. Mr. Chan has told me to be a good boy.

Trapped

by Yolanda So Tsz Wan

Imagine you are an ornament to a five by five feet cubicle. Any ornament will do. Any ornament that could strike a pose and keep it still for years. Some desirable candidates would be an emptied cigarette pack on the floor or a wrinkled notice stapled to the board. The purpose of portraying oneself as an ornament of this sort is to be invisible, to be irrelevant. Now you may wonder, what is the purpose of this ornament if it does not serve the purpose of an ornament? What is it doing here? Or better yet, to just ask simply, what is it? Well then, I think it is safe to say that that ornament is me.

But I had no recollection of the last time I entered this cubicle, or the last time I exited from it. I was only conscious of me here and now. And so if there is ever a grid reference, its longitude ranging from A to E, while the latitude from 1 to 5, I could tell I was somewhere around D4. From D4, I gently trotted around the confined space, making giant strides out of small steps, till some beads of exhaustion effused from my tiniest pores. I stopped. I tilted my head to glance upward for the first time to seek the name to the cubicle, the exotic name on an aluminum plate above a number panel, glistening but altogether very much identifiable – the name that said Toshiba Electronics.

Driven by either a gush of temptation or a sense of familiarity, I lifted up my wrist to finger every single number button on the panel. Each of them was present except one – I hesitated at 15 as 14 went missing. At the precise second, as if someone hiding somewhere had chanted a spell, the two metal doors next to the panel swung open, gesturing great hospitality to the other side of the doors, my unknown universe. Instinctively, I backed down a few steps to get a general

view of what it was going on out there, while tightening my grip on the rail behind my back. A peculiar stiffness immediately registered from my eyelids, descending towards my shoulders, knuckles and fingertips. I supposed there were ten or so people came thrusting into this humble cabin, all dressed in similar outfits, judging by the simultaneous tramples of oxfords and high heels. Without any vision still, someone having his briefcase squashing on my elbow sucked out some remaining fresh air near my earlobe. He rationed it meticulously, a reasonable bit on each floor, never intending to leave some behind. Not for me, at least.

Like a dumb waiter excessively carried with trays of cuisines, the cabin rattled down to the podium in vain. I let out a secret sigh of relief when the unpleasant crowd finally left for good. Tints of appalling colognes and odors of body heat still lingered over the ceiling as if they were conspiring to suffocate the next passenger entering the cabin, experimenting with their next best formula, a formula that perhaps would not bring upon any apprehension by government officials. I maneuvered my body towards the mirror behind me and examined the reflection. Nothing was there save the outline of the cabin. Meanwhile, the lift doors closed.

* * *

A temporary closure, that was what I would call it. Around me, everything ceased to move. Not the lift, not a molecule of air, not the sound of anything. Only the fluorescent lamp accompanied my solitude, sheltering the wandering loner with the rightful amount of warmth and light in the gloomy metal fortress. I liked it here.

* * *

The ventilation gave out a thunderous grunt as the lift abruptly screeched up along the shaft. Coming back to my senses, I clung back

onto the rail for support. Someone had to be late for work to leave at this hour. Maybe he was the boss of a transnational corporation who would not even bother to check the agenda of the day or maybe he was just a schoolboy who still could not differentiate minutes with seconds. Or maybe I got it all wrong.

Her figure was slender and that was indeed the very first thing I noticed. If any of those antique television boxes exist till this day instead of the flat screen plasmas, she would still appear as equally phenomenal as now.

“Good morning,” she casually dropped the line as she entered.

She did not direct the line to a specific person, she dropped it. She “dropped” in a manner very much in resemblance to a pigeon handing letters to the appropriate recipients, very organic, very spontaneous. Startled and was taken aback at first by someone who actually acknowledged my existence, I picked it up in a muted response, a tiny nod of the head, trying in every possible aspect to cover up the anxiety.

She did not seem to mind. She did not seem to suspect either. Before I regained my speech and consciousness, she was already standing next to me, firmly though not violently, pressing on the button leading to the podium. All those sequences of motions happened swiftly in a fraction of a moment. An awkward silence then descended over the five by five feet space. Oh that awkward silence. The golden rule to remain as an ornament in a confined compartment is that either you have a lot of company to dismiss your very presence or you have to maintain your posture in every circumstance. That rule, by far, was certainly violated with the nod.

Amid the silence, amid the sensuous fragrance that began to assault my nostril and tickle my cheeks, I leered at her. The beauty of

leering is it does not involve any body movement, narrowing both eyes horizontally inclining thirty degrees will do and so in the meantime, I got to keep my 'ornament' persona, partially, if not entirely.

Fully dressed in a pink stewardess uniform and medium heels, hanging onto a compact piece of personal rolling luggage, she was a flight attendant for sure. No wonder she could be this late. In exactly five minutes later, she would reach the MTR station for a ride straight towards the Hong Kong International Airport. Of which airline she worked for, that I did not know. But I could know for sure that the bundle of her exceptionally long chestnut-dyed hair was going to steal the attention along every counter. In another twenty minutes, she would be ordering a toast and tea as breakfast, but not today. Underneath the thick shield of artificial fragrance, I could still smell a hint of morning breath. Even though it was very mild, the roasted bread and tea leaves were not in tune with the entirety of her blends of fragrance. Just as I was beginning to plunge into the counting of her types of scent, the scent was already departing, departing to the airport.

Something was immediately not right. Some parts of me did not sound right. Beneath the ribs inside my left chest, my heart began to gorge with blood, yelping for attention like an infant 140 times per minute, a fatal rate I dare not reach when sprinting on a treadmill. Even the latest aircraft would marvel at a drastic acceleration in a few seconds time. This particular encounter was odd. The image of her seemed to entangle my mind, gripping, ever so tightly like an Italian mafia used a garrote wire. I had wanted to chase out and question her on heaven knows what I planned to question – her name, her occupation or even her three magic wishes, if she had any. But then, when the doors clasped close again, I wiped the sweat off my forehead with my watery palm and cowardly dismissed the preposterous thought.

I could not begin to explain what that so called emotional haywire was. Perhaps it was a moment of the Hollywood-style revelation to my mysterious identity. Or perhaps now I should shut up, remain in the lift, inhale a great deal of air and be a good citizen.

I had a feeling we would meet again.

* * *

The fact is that I enjoyed dreaming. To use the word “fact” is a lie for I had absolutely no idea whether or not it was a fact. Anyhow, since I was trapped in this fortress, having practically nothing to do, I might as well dream.

Dreaming is a charming matter. It grants impossible wishes possible. It reincarnates sights forlorn in memories. What could be a better bargain than to watch the live duet of Eddie Van Halen and Eminem on stage together? Gang-rapping whilst tapping on the frets.

But normally I would not brag about my dreams, because most of the time, recurring episodes appeared to me meaninglessly. By meaningless, I mean really, really meaningless. Meaningless to the superlative. Sequels to the Godfather and prelude to Shawshank Redemption are fine. Rewinds of the Scary Movies are what I would categorize as dreams I frequently revisited, and dreams which would be promptly dismissed.

She was in this latest one, though, one which most definitely would not be categorized along with the dismissibles. Her chestnut hair was there flinging about in the pressurized aircraft cabin. Her slender waist was wavering as she balanced herself on the aisle.

“Coffee or tea, sir?”

Again, she dropped the line, only this time the line was added with a slight twist of sincerity, which, if properly measured on a scale, could perhaps score a 20 out of 10. Part of the persona an airhostess

inevitably put on while at work. Perfect.

Boldly taking the advantage that no possible repercussion could matter in dreams, I decided to put on a jest.

“Oh, no thanks I am alright. Could you fetch me some water though? The pressure in the cabin’s making me sick.”

Her dazzling eyes struck back with contempt.

* * *

I started to feel sorry about myself. Sorry about the fact that I liked it here. The more I liked to remain in this metal solitary fortress, I gathered, the more of my physical self was imprisoned and, the more intense of my desire to escape from this modern purgatory. Try the legendary Sichuan hotpot and perhaps you would begin to understand. Seeds of the dried chilies melted within the thick crimson soup that was readily prepared for any daring customers, and, as if the sight of the mixture was not enough to offer a vivid subtext that indicates danger, you would still swallow the entirety of the abrasive, chillingly addictive excitement.

As I took a tour to casually scan around the surroundings, stretching my eyes, my eyebrows gradually interlocked – and they were nothing like a friendly encounter, they manifested a state of confusion and dismay. Even Robinson Crusoe and Chuck Noland, had companies. Friday and Wilson were always there for them, physically and spiritually, to be their audience. Would any of Hamlet’s soliloquies be everlastingly appreciated if they were chanted upon an empty stage? Because if a tree fell down in the forest and nobody was there to hear it, did it make a noise?

Before I was given the chance to recover, she had already marched in the lift in her usual outfit. Peculiar. You know, or in fact, you do not know since I had not told you yet, I possessed a staggering

amount of three brains. One of them processed any information my senses collected from the surroundings; another digested such information, taking a route full of hurdles and obstructions, to respond in terms of various reflexes and speech; the third one, oh that almighty third one, believe it or not, was a reservation of the above two brains. A contingency plan if you must name it. Now, I admit, her dramatic entrance had literally made me lost my grip. Some bits and pieces preceding her entrance were missing. I attempted to dive back into my already vague memory of yesterday, calling upon the third part of my brain for any residuals of scents that were to linger since this morning, but the search was hopeless. Where was I between last evening and this morning?

That was it. I was dreaming. Within this icy cold steel chamber, I had been dozing off till she trolled her luggage and woke me up. By and by she was checking her reflection from the mirror behind and powdering both her cheeks with half a box of what I thought would be an alluring name of a French model, Chacott, while I followed the creamy trails emitted from the puffs with the corner of my eyes. All of sudden, things altered in slow motion. She turned away from the reflection slightly, making a friendly sort of a grin to me and gently lifting her free right hand to give an amiable wave. Nothing offensive. Nothing tempting. Just a random sequence of gestures. To return the courtesy and contemplate with the most suitable response, I squeezed out a faint smile, leveling my arms to support the disjuncture pairs of trembling palms, performing an imitation of some Chinese politicians at their best.

That cheered her up. I was not. Whether it was my folly or my imitation that gave her a tickle, I found them equally troubling, equally embarrassing. She was alarmed immediately by my solemn

melancholy. I mean, actually alarmed like a hound in search for its prey. Her pupils, instead of her eyes, exuded a queer kind of aggressive air that pierced into my guts. Very nauseatingly aggressive.

Silence. Despite the apparent awkwardness, we maintained our statue for some four hundred years, neither of us intending to go back to the status quo. Oh, if only there was now the slightest hurtle of the lift coming to rescue! Another 5 minutes had come and gone, and she made a move that was completely outrageous.

She punched on the emergency button carefully concealed upon the metal panel.

“Who are you?”

“I don’t know.”

Why on earth did I reply?

“What do you do for a living?”

I ignored her. She decided to press on.

“I see. You think you’re trapped in here and it doesn’t matter because no one knows who you are outside these four walls. Even you yourself have no idea of who you really are. But you’re wrong.”

I glared at her, mumbling a meager attempt to change the subject,

“You were on the plane.”

“Yes.”

“I was there.”

“Yes.”

Yes?

“But it was merely a dream in my head.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

Seeing the sight of my bemusement, she produced a used air ticket from her purse and very kindly, fingered at the name that said, ‘Sebastian Lee’.

I dismounted from the lift.

The Shadow

by Sarah Yu Wing Yee

After ten years of residence in this housing estate, I was now fully packed with my belongings sitting alone in the nearby children's playground. It was a sunny Friday. The smiles and sweat of the innocent children shone under the cloudless blue sky. Some were sliding excitedly from the tall and crooked slides while some were chasing after their little friends in their hide-and-seek game. One mother frowned and yelled like a hawk, "be careful! Don't run too fast!" They kept running. Drops and drops of sweat keep dripping from their forehead down to their nose or to their cheeks. It was once my childhood, but I lost faith in parental love long, long ago.

"Beep Beep", my watch groaned. Damn it. Just two o'clock. Didn't it think that it was so annoying like my mobile phone? Couldn't I just be free from the unanswered yet incessant phone calls? Of course the millions of voicemail messages that I had received were even more tiresome. "Ching Ching, where are you? I am so worried about you. Do call back," that voice was like a spell and kept recurring in my mind. If I could go back to the past, I would definitely prevent the creation of these shitty electronic gadgets. "I called your school. They said that your father called them and asked for a sick leave for you. But when I phoned your father, he only told me that you were not with him and hung up the phone. Are you okay? Can you just call..." Blah Blah Blah. I swiftly rotated my thumb on my ipod, and plugged the earphones into my ears.

The wind blew gently and there was a swirl of the smell of roses circulating in the playground. At the other side of the playground, full-blown flowers were smiling confidently on the trees. When I was

still fed on milk powder, dad loved to buy a small bunch of roses after work. Mum and I would wait for him at the door. Whenever the door swung open, mum chuckled and grinned. Her eyes became two short horizontal lines. “Muah.” Dad would always kiss on her cheeks and they would say “I love you, honey” to each other. Smiling, both of them would smooth my hair and stroke my cheeks. The smell of roses lingered in our house throughout dinner. “Ching Ching, open wide. Have a try of mum’s sweet and sour pork,” once, dad said and fed it to me. “Hey! She is just 3 years old. She can’t eat it,” mum moved her elbow a little bit to hit dad’s chest. “Argh!” Dad pretended a painful voice, but the slice was already in my mouth. I tried to move my jaws to chew it with my tiny teeth. It was unforgettably crunchy and I felt as if it was perfectly scented with roses too. It was the one and only sweet and sour pork that dad fed me. The silence in our flat afterwards was like a warning to me.

“I will catch you,” a kid shouted and broke the silence in my meditation. He tried to swing his arms more violently to run faster. It was in vain. The kid that he was chasing seemed to be further and further away. In life, there is something that we are dying for it but will never be in our hands; when you are allergic to something, they keep recurring in your life. Just like these “uncles” who kept recurring in my home in recent years. How many were there totally? Three? Four? Or five? Who cares about the shitty number? Every time when mum brought one home, I just slammed my door with my greatest power, turning my hi-fi at the highest pitch to prevent myself from hearing their passionate conversation. They bought me roses which were so colourful and so beautifully tied into a bunch – that must be mum’s idea. So what? They were no more than the smell of toilet deodorizer lingering in the flat. I knew they would put insects in the

flowers so that when I took a breath on the petals, I would become the most stupid girl in this planet to get bitten. They just wanted me to get out of the planet so that they can live with mum forever. Haha. What a sweet idea. Wake up bastard. I am not a fool.

Ah Ming was different. He never used any device. I knew he would be my husband. He concentrated on his own career and me. The nights with him on the beach were the most wonderful nights in my life. I imagined myself becoming the charming ladies in films, being escorted to and fro there with his motorbike. Last time, we lay on the silky sand, counted the sparkling stars in the dark sky and he sang my idol Jay Chau's song to me. He smoothed my hair and stroked my cheeks, very much in dad's way. Sometimes, he took me to have dinner with his best friends and they would call me "Ming Sou" (that means the wife of their respected friend Ah Ming). "I see you me as my wife already. I wish to take care of you forever, if you nod your head," Ah Ming whispered in my tiny ears the first time I heard this name. I felt a flush of sweetness from the bottom of my heart. It was the best dessert ever.

Yes, I did. I wished to be Ming Sou. That's why I was sitting here. Today, I would officially yet secretly become Ming Sou and move into his flat. Everything was ready except Ah Ming. I understood, "men have to work. I just wish to go shopping with you in Milan without glancing at the price tag." I touched my stomach, and thought of him again.

The wind continued to blow mildly, and the whole playground was immediately soaked with the smell of rose's perfume. Spring had come. Amid the grasses and trees in the resting area, I spotted my favourite flowers in rainbow colour. Red. Orange. Green. Purple. Pink. Each colour counted for a kind of fascination to me. I stretched myself

freely, closed my eyes softly, took a breath deeply and imagined myself sleeping in the flowering shrubs. How relaxing.

It might seem a bit childish, but sleeping in a bed of roses had always been my childhood dream. With the roses at home, I loved to sit on the cloud-like sofa and take an afternoon nap, imagining the sofa was made up with petals. I felt it was a dream come true. But when I grew up, I realized that in real life, it was never possible to live in a bed of roses. Roses have thorns.

“Ching Ching! I’m so worried about you,” suddenly, the familiar voice breaks into my life. Shit. I deftly fumbled around in my pocket and pressed the “Decline” button on my mobile phone. The voice did not stop but became nearer, “Ching Ching! You are here!” I opened my eyes and unplugged my earphones. Shivering, I saw a woman with messy hair grasping for breath in front of me, and trying to put her sweaty hand on my arms. She looked as if she had found me everywhere. Spotting my luggage, her face turned dark. “What? Don’t tell me that you are going to elope with that guy! Stop the nonsense! It’s impossible!” She yelled.

Suddenly there was an unknown spotlight shinning from the sky onto me. I stood solitarily in the middle of the spotlight. Pairs and pairs of scared and despising eyes from every parent and every child glimmered. If God was the Shepard of every human-being, was it the way he directed me? Wait. What was the next step?

I quickly stood up, grabbed my luggage and walked away. “Maybe we should walk our own way from now on,” I muttered in a low voice as I turned. After a few steps, I hesitated, and then stroke in a faster pace. Birds were singing merrily on the trees, and the breeze blew my hair. Refreshing. I walked past the parents who sat on the bench. Despising eyes were looking me up and down. I looked straight

forward without looking back. Freedom, I was coming.

But life didn't grant you with the power to rid yourself of something you didn't want. Suddenly, a hand grasped my arm from the back and warned me.

"Ching Ching. Don't go! That guy is not a decent man. He is cheating you!" She grabbed my arm and blocked my way.

"What? What guy? Do you mean the bastards you brought home?" I had a glance on her face and replied.

"Shut up! I mean the guy you are going to live with," her eyes were filled with fury, but she never knew how furious I had been these years.

I gave her a sardonic smile and exclaimed, "First, his name is Ah Ming, but not the guy. Second, he is a decent guy and I am willing to sacrifice myself to him, even though he is a fraud." I pointed my index finger to her chest. "Third, I don't think the silly guys you brought home were decent. Forth, I will shut up forever and vanish in your eyes, if you PLEASE let me go!" I swung my arms forcefully, escaping from the clutch of her hands.

"But you are only eighteen years old!" She hurried to stop me from leaving. "You can't judge between the right and wrong. Listen, you mustn't go!" She looked into my eyes strictly and seized my arms tightly.

However stern the eyesight was, I didn't get into a fuss. I sneered and mimicked her tone. "You are right. I am only eighteen years old. Not mature enough le. But you were already an innocent mother when you were eighteen years old. Haha. You were so mature woo. Did your mother stop you? How did you respond to her? Even if you could be a mother at that age, why can't I decide on my life now? I am just learning this from you, and you have no right to teach me a

lesson!” I released her hand and crossed my arms, looking elsewhere. She stared intently at me powerlessly. I broke the dullness, “Okay. I am going. See you,” as I attempted to take her hand away from me and pick up my luggage. I didn’t need any mother.

She didn’t release her hand. She pulled me towards her with an unknown force and embraced me into her. “Ching Ching... Why? Why can you behave like this?” The tough lady wept and trembled, with her hands forcefully pushing me onto her. “Why?” She did not cease weeping, with her head landing on my shoulders. It was so warm, and wet.

I thought of the lonely and crying nights at home, eating McDonald’s with the television, when my friends were eating happily with their parents. What she said after coming back at ten was “how’s your homework”. My face felt cold, and I rubbed it on the sofa. It was wet too, but I never asked anyone to take any goddamn pity on me.

“You get what you pay for,” I said coldly, “I have had enough these years. Please let go of me,” as I tried to push her away from me. “My blissful future is waiting for me, but not the monotonous evenings sitting alone in the flat!” I pushed her a little bit harder, but in vain. My shoulder was getting wetter and wetter.

“Ching Ching,” she sobbed. “You are so like me! I... I don’t want you to repeat my life!” She slammed the floor with one of her feet. “I have been regretting my imprudent youth for long, but I see all the things you are doing now are so similar to my experience.”

I did not move. She was right.

“I know I didn’t give you the best, but I simply want to give you a better life,” she continued. Working for a full time job and a part time job was always exhausting and stressful. Every night after you were asleep, I asked myself why I should work so hard,” she sighed,

stopped crying, and released me while still holding both of my arms tightly. “But when I thought of your future, I knew it would pay off some day! Do you remember the day that you were playing the piano and I suddenly cried?”

Yes. I will not forget. That was my fifth piano lesson when I was in primary school, and I managed to play a whole song. My fingers danced with the rhythm on the keypad, and my teacher was so surprised. Until she left, mum was still sitting on the sofa, looking at me without uttering a word. Then she broke into tears, told me to continue practising, and locked herself in her room.

“Sure,” I muttered.

“Ching Ching, I had suffered a lot since your dad had left with that fox. You had been the reason for me to be tough,” she grinned, while her face was still full of tears. “That night I was so exhausted, but I was just so proud of you and couldn’t stop crying.”

I raised my hand to wipe the tears on her face. Her eyes were red, full of tiring blood vessels, but without anger now. In the outer corners of her eyes, wrinkles had appeared silently throughout the years. Her skin was rough, with freckles on her cheeks. A few white hairs shimmered amid her black hair on her cheeks. I gently tied her hair to her ears, stroking her hair.

I bit my lips and said, “I... I never knew how you feel. I just...”

“Ching Ching,” she shrugged and stopped. “No. No. No. Don’t say that. I know I had been neglecting your feelings. But I promise I won’t. These days I thought about a lot of things.” She smiled and landed her hand onto my shoulder. “Do you know why I made your name Ching Ching?” She looked up and continued, “it was because I wanted the sunny days be with you all the time!”

I looked up onto the sky. The weather was very fine today. The

sun shone confidently. Ching Ching. Yes. I really loved sunny days. “Let’s keep the silence and enjoy this afternoon, you and me only! Okay?”

We grinned, as we wiped the tears on each other’s face. Sitting on the bench, we were hand in hand seeing the children run. The familiar faces had gone. Those who were sweating in the playground before were sitting breathlessly beside us with their parents. The mothers carefully wiped the sweat on their face, their chest and their back. The wind continued to blow and I lay my head onto her shoulder. I touched her fingers. They were stubby and coarse, while mine was silky and thin.

“Beep Beep,” my watch sang. I peeped into it. Six o’clock, time for Ah Ming to leave his work. I thought about him, and what he said in his lunch time today. “Tonight, we will be in the same family. Me and you, forever. And the three of us will be living happily soon.” I swiftly looked up to see what mum doing was. She was looking at the children happily. I did not dare to think, and secretly fumbled into my pockets, switching off my mobile phone.

I looked up onto the sky, feeling the unfamiliar warmth on my hand and my shoulder. An aeroplane flew from the left to the right, passing through the solitary cloud in the sky. I turned my head from the left, gradually to the right to watch it, until the aeroplane vanished near the golden sun.

“It’s kinda late now. Let’s go home.” I stood up to say. She stood up after me and I could see her tall shadow beside me. I gave her a satisfying smile, and walked away from her shadow.

Mirroring Him

by Alice Chui Yeuk Ling

I've been making myself comfortable on that hammock ever since the day I appeared back in this house. I don't know how I got here or why, but I have existed here, in this garden, ever since the car took my life 3 months ago. I have a vague memory of the garden itself but I remember that hammock well. I bought it when Mother moved into this house. I thought that the nice little garden would go to a complete waste if there was nothing there for Mother to relax and enjoy nature's beauty. But I don't think anybody really got round to using it ever since we had it hanging across the lawn. Gliding over the green patches, I stop and hover next to the hammock. It was rocking gently from side to side in the slight breeze of the summer afternoon. Reaching out, I gingerly grab the white ropes with my pale fingers. I gave an inward smile when I felt the texture of the white cotton — solid and rough, enclosed in my translucent palm. Running a hand alongside the edge of the hammock, I alleviated higher off the ground and did a flip. Lying back slowly, I made sure each part of my body was fully supported upon the white cotton web before I relaxed. It had taken about a week for me to finally master this skill of holding and lying on things without having them go straight through my grasp or body. Apparently, it is easier to pick up and master a skill when you are dead. I gave a faint chuckle. Shifting my weight, I place my arms under my head and swing the hammock in a slight rhythm to the breeze. I watch the clouds laze its way across the clear blue skies. At least I am able to do something without the intention to achieve his standards now that I am dead. I have spent my whole life trying to parallel with his abilities, at least I did not have to do it now. If he was

here though, he would probably have done it twice as fast as I did. He always did better. Yes, my brother always did — David was always the better one...

* * *

Jonathan tossed the briefcase onto the couch and shrugged off his long coat. Drops of water sprayed onto nearby furniture creating immediate dark stains. Kicking off his soaking wet leather shoes, he collapsed onto the couch, tugged his tie and gave a long sigh. It had started pouring when he got out of the office but he did not have an umbrella. He was thoroughly drenched but he did not care. It had been a long day again, and he was exhausted. His stomach gave a low growl. He gave a glance to the grandfather clock standing in the hallway — a quarter to midnight. When was the last time he had eaten? He had a vague memory of stuffing a bagel in his mouth and downing his usual Black Grande Starbucks coffee this morning. Was that it? He could not remember. The growing throb in his temples was making it harder for him to think properly. He was too exhausted to even lift his hands to give them a rub. The plush cushions behind his back felt good on his back muscles. Giving in to their softness, Jonathan closed his weary eyes. He could feel tension releasing from his back. Perhaps he should bring these to work, he thought. It could help ease some of the stiffness from his back...but when was the last time he sat in that chair of his? He gave a sigh and shook his head. No, he seldom sat on his chair. He was usually up and about. Running around, making sure everything was in order. There was no time for relaxation, not in that office of his anyway. It demanded too much of him. Time was most precious. Time was of the essence in the office. If there were 3 words to describe his daily office situation, it would be — “speed, innovation and sharpness.” It was never relaxation and peace.

The sharp shrill ring of the telephone interrupted the tranquility of the house. His eyes flew open. Glancing down the hallway at the grandfather clock again, he had a good hunch as to who would be calling at this hour. It had to be her. Her timing was always “perfect.” “Brr-ring...brr-ring...brr-ring...brr-ring...” He willed the phone to stop ringing. Perhaps she’ll give up if there was no answer after two more rings. “Brr-ring...brr-ring...brr-ring...brr-ring...” No, just as always, she was persistent. She knew he had to be home by now. With much dread, he heaved himself from the couch and dragged his tired body to the hallway where his phone was hung. Standing upright, he took a deep breath and picked up the phone.

“Hello Mother.”

“Jonathan, for a moment I thought you were not going to answer my call, whatever took you so long?”

“I just walked into the apartment Mother, I just got back home from the office, of course I would need some time to get to it.”

“Alright, so how’s the progress at work? It seems to be taking quite a while.”

“I’m working on it Mother, it’s not as easy as you think, starting up a magazine from scratch, I’m getting there. It’s getting more and more readers now.”

“Good, I’m just beginning to get a little worried. You are taking so long. You know it’s what your brother would have wanted. He wanted to break away from The Elite and start his own magazine ever since he realized they did not give him the freedom to write what he wanted. He would have loved to see this day; he had worked so hard for it...if it weren’t for...”

“Yes I know Mother,” he interrupted abruptly. “I’m glad I can help David finish what he wanted. But it does take a little more time to

get everything on a smoother track.”

“Alright, maybe you’re right. It’s getting late, I’m going to bed, you should too, and you have work tomorrow. Your brother would also have gone to bed by now.”

“...yes Mother, I’m about to...”

“Oh and Jonathan, come to the community club with me this coming Saturday, the old ladies loved having you around last time. I’ll talk to you soon.”

“It wasn’t me that they loved last time Mother, it was David... and, good night to you too Mother.” He murmured to the dead tone on the phone as he hung up the phone.

As if the phone call had drained all the energy out of him, he collapsed against the wall and sat sprawled across the hallway and closed his eyes. David...it was all too painful to remember.

* * *

Drifting back inside the house, I went through the glass patio, through the wall and into the living room. The house was empty and quiet. Mother had probably gone out to the stores. Looking around, I noticed that Mother was still using the set of brown and white furniture set I mentioned I liked, and would compliment the house, when I was still alive. I broke into a tiny smile. I thought she said she disliked the colour tones. Gliding through the sofas, I stopped in front of the fireplace and looked at the assorted photo frames on the mantel piece. It was a collection of pictures of me and David since young. There was young David holding me up wrapped in a bundle when I was first born; us in our matching suits as we celebrated our 4th birthday together; another of us holding swords and guns as we played in a make-belief war game; then there was the both of us in our high school uniforms; David graduating with a Journalism degree; me holding my

favourite surf-board, and me in front of the Statue of Liberty when I did a graduation road trip around the United States 2 years ago. Picking up the frame with me and my surfboard, I stared intently at the guy in the picture frame. I had always thought that Mother had disapproved of my “wild” sport especially since she was not particularly happy every time I came home bruised, scratched or sun-burnt. But perhaps, she didn’t. That was me 3 years ago, when surfing was my ultimate passion. But I stopped ever since David died. I just did not have the time anymore. I gave a wistful smile as I glanced at the picture of me on my graduation trip, Mother and I had got into a fight over this trip because she wanted me to be helping out David at his new firm rather than taking a holiday and traveling the world. David had always been the “golden boy” in the family — the family pride. If anyone was to get the top grades in class, it would definitely be David. During high school, David was captain of the basketball team and all the teachers adored him. Even when he got into college, he remained a “star student” in the eyes of the professors. When he started to work, he had such a great passion and love for what he was doing, he decided to create his own destiny by starting his own magazine from scratch when the magazine company (The Elite) he was working at disapproved of his choice of writing topics and honesty in writing his articles. But with David’s personality, optimism and charisma, he attracted people to him in every way, and many of his good buddies offered to help him out with his new company. For years, I looked up to my “perfect” elder brother. I walked in his footsteps and was proud of him in every way. Mother was forever proud of David, he gave her the satisfaction of being a great mother and his achievements always brought great joy to her face. It never occurred to me that I should feel jealous of such a brother because I loved my brother, and David was indeed truly

outstanding. Despite my efforts to give my best, it was never enough to out-shine David. David was the outstanding son, the one who was the best. And I, as always, would be in the shadows of such a perfect brother, sometimes wondering if my presence was ever noticed.

* * *

A painful lurch in his stomach brought him back to his senses. He had almost fallen asleep sitting in the hallway. Perhaps he should grab something to eat. These lurches were not unfamiliar. He has had them for the past few nights when he was working overtime and forgoing his meals. Pushing his body up against the wall, he staggered back towards the couch and grabbed his car keys. He should really get a burrito at the 24-hour Mexican taco place at the end of the road. He was beginning to feel a little light-headed from the lack of food. Staggering out the door, he took several deep breathes and willed the painful lurches in his stomach to go away. Feeling slightly better, he made his way to his car and backed out of the garage of his house. Taking a turn, he accelerated down the road to the Mexican taco place. A sudden painful squeeze made him lurch forward onto his steering wheel, sending a long honk into the middle of the night. Images of that fateful night came rushing to him. He remembered driving on this very same road and honking to make sure people were out of his way as he sped towards the hospital. Focusing on the street, he tried to push the images out of his head. He did not need to go through them again. Not again. Not tonight. But as he drove, he felt himself going back in time again, he was driving on this road, grabbing the same steering wheels, so hard, his knuckles were white. His mother was sobbing uncontrollably in the back seat, and his father was murmuring words of comfort. They were rushing to the hospital in hopes of being able to see his brother one last time. He remembered receiving the telephone

call, his mum screaming no and him automatically rushing to the garage and starting his car. They made it to the hospital, but they did not make it in time. The pile-up traffic incident was too serious. David died as they took him into the emergency unit. Everything was pretty much a blur after that. The grieving, the funeral, selling David's house, taking up responsibility in his new company, all of a sudden, David was out of their lives, "the one who was better" no longer existed. His beloved brother was gone.

Pulling to a stop in front of the red lights, he felt tears blurring his vision. Was it the pain in his stomach? Or was it because the memory of losing his brother was overwhelming him again? He could not tell. Grabbing the steering wheels harder, he tried to push those unbearable memories out of his head. His stomach contracted again, this time so painful, he lurched over his steering wheel. They never really got over the death of David, no one really did, especially Mother. He let out a moan as the contracting in his stomach sharpened. What was wrong with his stomach tonight? In a distance, he saw that the light had turned green. Stepping on acceleration, he proceeded to snail pace his way down the road. His stomach was now so painful, it felt like someone had stabbed him in the chest. A wave of nausea came over him and he absentmindedly felt his hands swerved to the right as the contraction in his stomach came again. Without any warning, he felt glaring white lights coming up to him on his right. He tried to step on the car faster but his hands left the steering wheel as the pain in his stomach made him doubled over. He heard a car honking loudly, the blinding of vision by glaring white lights. There was a bang. And then total darkness.

* * *

I died in the crash. My head landed on the pavement when the

other car crashed into mine. I was too occupied with my own thoughts that night I had forgotten to wear the seat belt. A noise in the garden made me stop my aimless wandering in the house. Perhaps Mother was back. Drifting out to the glass patio again, I saw Mother back from her grocery shopping. She had placed them on the patio table and was now sitting on the hammock holding something in her hands. I felt a slight rush of warmth in my heart. It was good to know that the hammock was finally put to use by Mother. Swooping down the patio steps, I glided across the lawn and hovered next to Mother. She had always been distant to me, at least that was what I felt. Mother never showed much affection the way she did with David. Perhaps I never really showed that I needed affection either. That was also probably why I kept calling her “Mother” instead of “Mum” or “Mommy,” it showed the distance in our relationship. Looking down at what she was reading, I was surprised to see that it was my diary. They probably found it in my belongings when my parents sold my house. Feeling a rush of embarrassment, I panicked as I saw Mother carefully looking through each page. It seemed like she was looking for something among the lines I wrote. Drops of tears trickled down her cheeks as she read about the entry I wrote a week after I took over David’s company. I had written that I felt like a shadow of the family even after his death. David’s impact within his company was so great everything I did seemed to be inferior compared to what he had done. I had ended saying that if I had died in place of David, everyone would probably be happier.

“Jonathan, you were unique yourself in every way, it was just unfortunate you had such an outstanding brother, he definitely took the entire spotlight away from you. But I just want you to know that I would have been equally devastated if you died in place of David, the

both of you mean so much to me,” murmured Mother as she lightly fingered the page of my diary.

Overhearing her statement, I felt a trickle of warmth run down my cool cheeks. I was crying. It was the most affectionate thing I’ve heard Mother ever said to me. I just felt that it was unfortunate I had to only hear about it when I had died. Reaching out I tried to wrap my hand over her hand. I really wanted her to know that I heard what she had said. And that I still love her more than ever. In a matter of 2 years, Mother had lost 2 sons. Both in a car-crash. It should be devastating for her. All I wish would be for her to finally let it go and live on strongly. However, it suddenly seemed like my powers of holding things had disappeared. Her hands slipped right past my grasp and my hand went right past her thighs. Surprised, I tried to sit next to Mother on the hammock. I fell right through the white cotton and almost landed on the grass. Looking down at my translucent skin, I felt myself turning lighter, more transparent and much more shimmering. Was I disappearing? Was this the reason I came back to this house? To hear it from Mother that had meant something to her? I had tried mirroring David all my life, but I was not him. I never could be. I am myself, I am Jonathan. Feeling much lighter at heart, I tried, one last time to envelop Mother into a hug before I ultimately and entirely evaporated into the summer air.

The Tie

by Anny Cheung Po Yuet

At the mouth of East Exit where one crowd after another poured out stood KaMing, waiting. He took a peek at his watch, and then quickly fixed his eyes back to the crowd. The eighth of August, a quarter past seven, a happy Friday, which was why Shibuya today seemed to be much more crowded. But there was more than that — KaMing could smell something unusual in the air which made the atmosphere more vibrant than it usually was. Maybe he was thinking too much. Maybe the last squeeze of mentality was down the drain with the grease and food dregs that he washed off from the too many dishes at his workplace. Pile after pile every Monday to Saturday from two to ten. He couldn't quite comprehend the world anymore after work. Although he had taken an early leave to pick them up today, the four consecutive days of work before worn him out completely.

They should have arrived at seven. KaMing, stretched his neck, peeping over the crowd trooping out of the Exit. He tried to spot a tall slender figure, as reminded by his very excited mom over the long-distance phone call from Hong Kong, among the people before they were pushed away by the crowd following. In fact KaMing couldn't be sure who he was looking for since he had never met this cousin from the Mainland. But he could pretty much imagine how they normally looked like — round gold rim glasses, very short hair, Adidas T-shirt(or Nike sometimes), with basketball shoes even though they never played basketball their whole life. Having stayed in Tokyo for a few months, KaMing was quite confident with his own sophisticated instincts in distinguishing Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean tourists among Japanese in a split second. To be able to spot Chinese out on

the street gave him a triumphal moment — he was finally an insider among these outsiders. He missed home.

‘The Japanese team is ready...’ Across the road the gigantic electronic advertisement screen, the landmark of Shibuya, hanging on the wall of the shopping mall howled. But KaMing couldn’t care less anymore because he could hardly keep up with the flow of the crowd now. Droopy eyes hastily darted from one head to another; he was trying hard to focus. With his left hand in his pocket touching his mobile phone, he had an unsuppressable urge to ring the restaurant and told them that he wanted a sick leave tomorrow. But his intelligence reminded him that in a couple of days the bulk of his fortune in his bank account would be all withdrawn for his tuition fee. Suck it up, he breathed in deeply. He had to suck it up before his Master Program started next month, for he knew that he wouldn’t be able to work as much by then. At the age of 23, he couldn’t gather enough courage to ask Mom to send him money anymore.

‘Be nice to them, show them around, MingMing. He’s your cousin.’ Mom’s repeated words whirled around his head. Hopefully he wouldn’t be too tired to fulfill Mom’s wish, he wasn’t sure.

‘Is it JiaMing?’ Suddenly a Chinese voice slipped into his ears.

Before he could pull himself out from his meditation, two approaching black silhouettes blocked his view.

A young couple came into Ming’s sight. The vogueish boy, LiJun, on the left had his hair dyed dark brown, nicely trimmed and gelled. He was about half a head taller than him (probably 6 feet tall) in a collar up stripped shirt inside and such a well tailored leather jacket outside. KaMing casted a glance at his shoes — surprisingly, he wore a pair of white classic Converse sneakers.

‘I am LiJun. And this is AiQin, my girlfriend.’ LiJun introduced.

Quickly brushed off his little astonishment, KaMing exchanged a glance with the slight female figure beside LiJun. AiQin, with all her hair pulled back neatly into a ponytail, was of shoulder height of LiJun. As she waved at him to greet him, Ming was caught by her catchy purplish red nail polish and the big glittery earrings dangling from her uncovered ears. AiQin wore a waist-hugging flowery dress with silver lace trim that set off her slimness. Through the way she dressed, it was not difficult to tell that she was also from a wealthy family. Like most Northern Chinese, she bore a pale complexion which was easily recognizable despite the dim green and yellow Neon lights overhead. If she didn't talk, Ming would happily conclude that she was from Taiwan or even Japan.

'Nihao. I am JiaMing. It's nice to meet you.' KaMing greeted them in his baby Mandarin. It was laughable to hear his own worn and eaten Mandarin, like the funny sound of a rusty door-hinge squeaking in the wind. Even though they were not his friends from Hong Kong, he was still glad that he could speak Chinese. For how long had he not spoken Chinese? After exchanging brief greetings, they set off to the Izakaya that KaMing had booked beforehand.

LiJun and AiQin followed KaMing, holding each other's hands. They had been together for three months. AiQin was stepping into her third year in college while LiJun was one year behind her. Walking behind KaMing, LiJun now had a good chance to examine this Hong Kong boy, the first and only Hong Kong boy he knew. He couldn't deny that he was so much out of his expectation. He had a photo of him with Auntie Yan, KaMing's mother, taken a few years ago. He had thought that he was like those he had seen on Hong Kong soap opera — round but overly confident sometimes, articulate and friendly in a worldly way. But KaMing was just like a lot of boys in

his college — plain, neat and down to earth. He had checked in front of the mirror attentively before leaving the hotel, making sure that he looked presentable in front of KaMing. Now he realized he might have worried too much.

Stopping in front of the traffic light where the gigantic electronic advertisement screen across the road was broadcasting an interview of some Japanese athletes, KaMing asked, ‘So both of you are college students?’ He had been curious about young Chinese life for long.

‘Yes. Art Majors.’ LiJun nodded. As if KaMing had asked him, he remarked, ‘But not everyone can afford that. You pay double the normal tuition fee.’ KaMing nodded blankly as he stared at the traffic light. He had known from Mom that they were from the wealthy middle-class in China. LiJun’s parents made their first million Yuan in real estates during the high time of China’s economic reform in the end of 80s, as many Chinese did.

The ticking traffic light took over KaMing’s mind. He felt a flow of uneasiness that he couldn’t explain crept up his skin even though the remark just now might be an unintentional slip of tongue. As the red traffic light fastened its beats when it turned green, the uneasiness surged. KaMing looked away.

After crossing the road, they made two turns at the corners; KaMing familiarly led them up the stairs of one of the buildings on his right. This was the Izakaya he had come a few times before with his friends. Reasonable price and food.

LiJun was more curious about the Japanese restaurant than what KaMing was saying to the lady. Peeping through the door he saw that half of the seats had been filled up. The restaurant was not big, probably could accommodate around fifty people at most. On the wall

there was a big TV screen broadcasting shooting a stadium. Young Japanese men and women were laughing loud and were boisterous, drinking their beer under soft, dim yellow light. He liked the brisk, cozy atmosphere here. It would help draw him and KaMing closer, he thought.

KaMing naturally took up the role of ordering food. He was prepared to cater to LiJun and AiQin's nit-picking, as he had learnt from his friends' experiences that this generation of children who grew up under one child policy had been given too much resources and attention from their parents. They were mostly spoiled. But he was wrong. They were exceptionally easy, sticking along with whatever he suggested. AiQin was very curious about how and what they cooked them with while LiJun was excited asking him to explain the funny Japanese names on the menu.

When the food came LiJun was glad that the little silly conversation had heated up the atmosphere. Now the restaurant had fewer vacancies and was filled with more noises. Young Japanese waitresses fly around serving dishes and beers.

'Your mom said you're completing your Master Degree at Tokyo University.' LiJun asked. 'That's very impressive.'

'True. It was tough though,' KaMing's voice dimmed whenever he talked about money, 'We are difficult with money.' Especially in front of LiJun and AiQin, who he wondered if they had ever had the experience of tossing and turning in their beds 3 a.m. in the morning, racking their brains to clear up the bills. He knew the first job marked his market price. He needed higher qualifications to back him up. He had to start off with an easier path.

'Didn't they offer you any scholarship?' It is true that living in Japan is more expensive than in Hong Kong, but he had heard that it

was very popular for young Hong Kong youngsters to study overseas.

‘I do. They cover half the tuition fee. I still have to make up for the rest. Accommodation, food and transport...you name it.’

Wasn’t life in Hong Kong easier compared with China? LiJun wondered. They were better educated, tech-savvy and lived on high-pay jobs in one of the world’s most stable city. ‘There was gold all over the ground in Hong Kong’, a popular saying among mainland Chinese popped up in his mind, ‘you just have to pick it up to make a fortune.’ Seeing the weariness on KaMing’s face, he started to doubt it.

‘I am sure you will get over, KaMing. Auntie Yan always says you are such a studious person. I show full respect to people who work hard for their life.’ he paused, worried whether it would be inappropriate to add, ‘You are lucky. Hard work pays off in Hong Kong. There are a lot of problems in China. It’s all about connection if you want to survive.’

KaMing could have thought that LiJun was being sarcastic to him. But no, from his cousin’s fixed gaze, KaMing saw something in his eyes. But he couldn’t figure out what it was. Being the wealthy, LiJun’s road must have already been well paved before he considered moving a finger to lift a brick.

AiQin picked up a piece of chicken with her chopstick, gentle and well-mannered. The table next to them was cleared off and swiftly filled with another group of six.

‘How about you two? What are you going to do after graduation?’ KaMing tried not to be too overt to show his desire to find out what in LiJun’s eyes was.

‘We become designers or painters.’ AiQin said.

‘Usually.’ LiJun added. ‘But the advertising industry is booming in China. The market is asking for more high-end advertisements.’

And there are all kinds of advertising agencies around, reaching out for young people with higher qualifications. We may get into one of those.'

Then AiQin recalled, 'I remembered our parents met another day and thought that it's quite a money-spinning idea to set up an agency ourselves.'

'Their mind is always stuffed with money. I mean they are good parents, good people. They are just too insecure because there is no fair play in China. All your money may be gone the next day you wake up, so you need to make sure they are pouring in.' LiJun followed grimly. And their single child became their source of security. He and AiQin had faced a lot of pressure from the families — being the single child meant that there were extra expectations to live up to.

At the table next door, the young guy in green sweater was apparently drunk, flunking his arms around like a mad man, holding a Japanese flag in his hands. His friends broke into laughter. The volume of the TV had been tuned up for some reasons. The clock above the TV showed that it was 8.45p.m. The whole restaurant was sheltered by a haze of festivity. Maybe it was the food that brightened him up or the Japanese Sake which had eased up his mind, KaMing found that he didn't feel as tired as he was at the beginning. He was relaxed — a rare occasion since he had arrived in Japan.

When the fried Tofu they ordered came, AiQin, like a silent observer reporting her observations, said in a small voice. 'JiaMing, have you met Jun's mother before?'

KaMing gave a slight shake of his head.

'You look very much like her.' Pointing at KaMing eyes and noses, she gave her remarks, 'The very straight nose and the round eyes are almost like a replication.'

Suddenly LiJun said, ‘Did you remember we met before?’

KaMing laid down the slice of raw salmon that he almost put into his mouth. ‘When?’

‘When I was seven, you were nine.’ As if he had known that KaMing would forget, LiJun replied plainly.

‘Oh, did you mean when Grandpa passed away?’ That was the only big incident when he was nine. He was born in a very big traditional Chinese family — seven uncles and four aunts, plus countless cousins in Mainland China.

‘Exactly.’

‘There were so many children around...’

‘I understood that.’ LiJun smiled. ‘I remembered you because you were the only Hong Kong kid among all of us. All the adults were talking about how lucky that you were born in Hong Kong. I watched you the whole day.’ As if to cover up the embarrassment of leaking his little secret, LiJun laughed.

KaMing searched his mind... a little skinny silhouette emerged. The face was blurry but in his hand a tightly grabbed paper jumbo jet model could be clearly seen. It was the boy that followed him everywhere all day when he and mom attended Grandpa’s funeral in ShenYang.

That made KaMing laugh to realize the weird boy was LiJun.

‘You dressed differently from other kids. You didn’t let me touch your toy car. I thought you didn’t like me.’

KaMing couldn’t believe someone was paying so much attention on him.

‘Oh, one more thing. How could I forget?’ LiJun quickly fetched his bag under the table. Unbuckling the bag, he took out a photo, framed.

Two women were in the photo, black and white. The rims were torn bit but well preserved. One of them, apparently, was his mom. Another one bore a straight nose and round eyes like him, smiling like a flower bathing in the summer sun. AiQin was right, he resembled Auntie Lian so much, even more than his own mother.

‘Everything was in a hurry when Auntie Yan moved to Hong Kong back then. Mom said this is the best picture they ever had together. Auntie Yan would love it.’

Suddenly, some people at the other corner of the restaurant broke into loud cheers. The three turned and saw that the people were attracted to the big TV screen on the wall of the restaurant. Clusters of splendid fireworks exploded rhythmically into different shapes in the dark sky above an open stadium. As the fireworks were rocketed into the sky, the people gathered near the screen and cheered in amazement for its magnificence.

It was Beijing National Stadium.

The clock above the TV screen said it was 9.08 p.m. KaMing checked his watch, 8.08 p.m. Hong Kong and Beijing time — It was the opening ceremony of Beijing Olympics. No matter the air in the street was so cheerful today. How could he forget about such an important day for all Chinese?

He turned back, meeting the eyes of LiJun’s. All of a suddenly, KaMing understood what that was in LiJun’s eyes.

With Love, From...

by Eva Leung

When the fourteenth of February comes, all of my unmarried female colleagues would either have boyfriends or secret admirers. This is the day when our office looks and smells the best. Whenever the door bell rings the ladies pretend to be reading documents, or typing reports, or on important phone calls. But they are like little pet dogs waiting for their masters to come home from work, sniffing the air and expecting their names to be called.

One bouquet after another of — roses and something else — cat-walking in, like expressionless models showing off themselves on the runway. Miss A's dozen of red roses (for the sake of protecting my colleagues I shall not give names) rests on her desk and stares at Miss B's pink ones, declaring war. Miss C's smaller bouquet hides in the corner — from this angle I cannot even tell what colour they are.

The door bell rings again, an enormous bouquet of — never mind — marches in like Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Miss D's name is called. There are some purplish... and ... white little flowers (forgive me), and the whole bouquet looks like a fat lady with a very thick layer of make up. Miss B's and Miss C's roses shy away as the bouquet of what-is-that dives into Miss D's arms. Miss D waltzes back to her cubicle, her triumphant gaze sweeps the office.

My male colleagues and I are sitting through the war at a very safe distance, breathing in the sweet odour. It is especially exciting when we have nothing to do with it — as long as we remain “unattached” (or married, indeed), the florists cannot rob us. But we also realise that to win this war, the bouquet does not have to be beautiful — size is all that matters.

And of course, it remains an open secret between us that the ladies who receive flowers from their secret admirers would probably be heading home straight after work, even if our very kind boss lets us leave after 6:30p.m. If you have spent \$1000 on a bouquet of flowers, would you want to be just a random Mr Secret Admirer?

When I was small I used to think that I would send my sister flowers on Valentine's Days. I would not allow her to buy them herself. I could sign my own name, and the other ladies in her office would still think she had a lover or an admirer (as a matter of fact, she did. Does). I imagined her looking surprised at the delivery, and she would smile to herself when she read my name on the card. It had not occurred to me, however, that she would not need my flowers.

For the first time in twenty-something years (I am not going to betray her) she had her birthday dinner without us — and brought home a bouquet of red roses. Our wireless land phones frequently ran out of battery. She began receiving letters, regularly and rather frequently, letters without a sender. The flowery, rainbow coloured personal letters were eye catching amidst a pile of bills and ads, but they disappeared into thin air once they reached my sister's room. Well, the whole issue of letter writing was already extraordinary in this era of email and instant messaging. I was, naturally, dying to know who this lucky guy was. My sister had a rather bad (but for this matter it was actually very good —) habit of leaving the computer on without signing out from her email accounts. So I could almost always accidentally check her emails for her. Unfortunately, there was nothing out of the ordinary in her mailboxes, only forwarded chain letters, confirmation emails from ebay, notification messages from facebook.

One thing was certain — my sister was not creating a lover-figure. Once an unfamiliar male voice called, and from the way my

sister snatched the receiver, I had no doubt the call was from Mr Mysterious. Only once, and of course the phone ran out of battery again the next morning. The letters kept coming though, and I was delighted to see my infatuated sister mailing her own flowery, full-of-hearts envelopes every other day.

Then one day, one of her many letters materialised on her desk. I knew it was immoral, and it is even more immoral of me to put it here now, (Please forgive me, God.) but what does it matter? — believe me, I kept dissuading myself; but then, when I have my own girlfriend in the future, how am I supposed to know how a love letter should be written? I picked it up.

The letter was short, and, to my astonishment, typewritten, in Vivaldi, something like font 13 or 14, which made it look like something written by Marianne Dashwood or Emma Woodhouse. It looked really romantic, (though not anywhere near as romantic as handwriting, I thought) but very difficult to read.

“My dearest love,” — it began,

“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.”

(I did not memorise this bit, I only figured where Mr Mysterious got this from, and searched for it on the internet.)

“Every day of the week, I dream of meeting you.
Every hour of the day, I long to see you.
Every minute of the hour, I think of you.
Every second of the minute, I miss you.
My heart, my liver, my goddess, I love you.”

(I remember this bit because there was a sequence; but maybe I mixed up the second parts of the sentences.

From this point onwards I skimmed through the rest of the letter, so the following words were not verbatim, but something that created the effect of:

“My mind is so full of you, and you are to be blamed when I cannot concentrate on my work.

Even though it has only been a couple of days that we have not seen each other, it seems to me it has been a few years already.”

(Then he quoted a line from a Chinese poetry with the same meaning.)

“Even though you would not reply my letters, I would keep on writing to you.

You think I’m promiscuous, and I’d prove to you that I would not even flirt with another girl because I am certain that you are the only one for me.”

Etc, etc.

Signed,

(a completely illegible signature — no one could ever forge it.)

I shivered. Love is merely a madness.

This is the day when the whole world goes mad, and when such madness becomes normality. Dinners are at thrice their usual price but still, restaurants are full of Roses and Jacks. The same lobster salad on every table. The same lover’s cocktail, the same lamb chop, the same

strawberry mousse cake, then the same complimentary rose for every lady. You could almost see pink hearts floating in the air. Numerous Romeos kneel on one knee.

I reach home. My sister is in her room, lights off. Her bouquet of flowers is lying on the dining table, a dozen blood-red roses cushioned in pink, like the shopping bags unloaded after a long day. I turn it over.

No cards. Mr Mysterious remains Mr Mysterious.

The monitor's light is on — I move the mouse and the pit black screensaver dissolves into my sister's mailbox. The cursor skates toward the "logout" sign when the following words shoot into my eyes:

Your order has been delivered! *Code: flowerhk-112*

I click in.

But before the page loads itself I close the browser and turn off the computer.

I sit by her bed. She wraps herself into a cannelloni with her blanket, sleeping like a child. The large pink-and-red flowery pattern on the blanket heaves with her breaths. She has the face of someone being content with everything in her life, someone who has all the love she needs. I watch her, still wondering which lucky guy would have her heart.



Poetry



Hong Kong Sketches

Kong Girl

by Alexis Wong

Across the golden brown waves,
tides of high heels surge forward.
LV monograms, thousands of them
as shiny as the glossy lips.
Seemingly smooth faces
whiter than the roadside smog.
The collective proud radiance
dims even the afternoon day light.

Black fiber butterflies
rest upon the eyes,
sticky enough
to trap a fly.
The glassy blackness
swallows the illumination
of the iris.
Nothing can be seen
except an endless pool
of rigid darkness.

The rainbow claws
sharp and neat as cutting edges
grab a tiny phone.
Claws won't hurt,
fluent and piercing sounds
are meant to be the weapons.

Suki, Yuki, Tinky, Winky
and even Angelababy —
if names mean anything,
these funny syllables
could be as helpful
as the barcode used
to identify each Barbie doll
on the best-seller rack.

Friday Blues

by Maggie Lau

Start putting on make-up, make yourself cool.
Leave your work behind, take off your uniform shoes.
Plug the mikes on and roll the drums.
Turn down the lights, let the lonely hearts come.

Let the alcohol flow, drink all your share.
Whirling in your head. Put your hands up in the air.
Put up a smile, kill a shot and enjoy the puff.
Let your instinct go wild. Tonight you'll find your love.

He was from Texas, and California;
Malaysia and Barcelona;
Manhattan, Washington, London, Brighton...
He said he's settling: Well, it's true for just a second.

The stars are leaving, so is everyone;
Neglect the moon, I don't want to see the sun.
Jumped off the cab, alone, on my bed I lay,
Hoping tomorrow is better than yesterday.

Learning to Love Hong Kong

by Joyce Yip

Exquisite crowns all disappeared, with space
replaced by Bauhinia.
Classic red all covered up.
Post boxes turned green and purple.

The crying Patterns waved goodbye with tears
that did not lie.
Family friends half gone for somewhere they
said better than home.

Phonetics and national anthem in
Mandarin taught suddenly.
One change after another —
the Eight year-old had no clue.

From loving with innocence
To loving with obligation
The eight year-old was told
It was the time to learn to love.

Learning to Love Hong Kong – Alas!

by Joyce Yip

Learning to work faster —
learning to fast for work.
Learning to work longer —
learning to long for work.

Learning to eat organic
means learning to eat costly.
Learning to get up early
while learning to sleep later.

Learning to love this
Hong Kong,
learning to live in
Hong Kong.

Chinese Offerings

by Michael Tsang

A church in the Chinese sense:

The mode of communication between the living and the dead
through its pyramidal top —
the chimney, the tool reaching Heaven directly,
getting the descendants' tributes across the thin,
obscure layer of life and non-life,
sending ancestors their half-yearly salary through dark soot.

A mad fire snake jabs its heads at the burnt-red inner wall,
its tongues licking greedily skyward,
ejecting ghost fire hovering in mid-air,
as descendants feed it with paper offerings.
The snake grounds its base to a larger influence,
as the thickening pile of black ash
gives a backdrop to the mechanical, instant action of throwing and turning.

Those incompletely combusted pieces of grey, black, and white,
are ejected out of the church, and
like a whirlwind,
guarded the church door,
dirtying the hair and face of whoever comes with indifferent eyes.
The blackening church there is —
dirt, soot and smudge like a scandal smear
on the once light beige bricks.

A caretaker ploughs the ash,
and a huge pile of the salary remains
untouched, unspent,
unseen, unchecked, unnoticed.



**To a
Special
Someone**

To Li Bai

by Alexis Wong

Under the ivory moonlight,
jar by jar
you pour the wine
to feed the pain.
You dance,
and your ever-changing silhouette
chaotically swings on the ground.
The moon is still lingering;
your sword drops
and is immersed in the lucid stream,
reflecting the paleness of the moon.

As the endless wind is blowing,
you bid farewell to the wild geese,
loosen your hair,
and step onto the leaving boat.
Your hair flutters in the breeze,
your footsteps unstable.
But you do not seem to care.
You drink again.

I wish I could stay with you
in the same boat
heading to the unknown multitude.
For the textbook only tell me
you see moonlight as frost

and you miss your homeland —
how I wish you could tell me
how to dance
and assure me
that getting drunk could be
a source of inspiration.

conversing with moon

by Cecilia Chan

why is eliot's moon in
rhapsody on a windy night
so distant and oblivious.

regard the moon,
yes moon i'm looking up.
la lune ne garde aucune rancune.
moon maman moon je ne sais pas...

she winks a feeble eye,
does anyone catch the twink?
she smiles into corners,
can you tell how far it stretches?
she smooths the hair of the grass.
why it must be arid must be dry.

the moon has lost her memory.
oh moon oh moon oh maman.
a washed-out smallpox cracks her face,
a sign to tell you've suffered a lot.

her hand twists a paper rose,
why a rose,
does she undo the curl,
or does she make one out of blank flat sheet?

that smells of dust and eau de cologne,
why don't you instead make a chrysanthemum,
which blooms like a bomb,
all outstretching petals, waits for you to dismantle.

she is alone
no you're not.
with all the old nocturnal smells
see i said you're not alone,
the smells drifting in air
that cross and cross across her brain
is shared by other drifters.

Aesthetic Violence

by Dorvis Chung

I saw you filming this scene, Quentin Tarantino,
celebrating the Songkran Festival accompanied with
the new year and the birth of democracy.

You use the red colour stage this time, burning tyres,
roasting ATMs and cooking bus sandwiches, the scene of ambitions!
I like the cowboys with assault rifles. They plashed and shot those pure water
out of the AK 47, VZ 58, AO 63 or whatsoever. You processed the screen
with that bloody red shadow, spread the bloodshed out of the air.

You rolled up the camera and shot a close up, replace
Japanese Samurai sword fighting into batons and shields,
one on one, left hand up and defense, cover from the tricky teargas;
right hand up and beat, shift the gravity to front left leg and fight;
appreciate the beauty of fighting!

Warrior red hit the head, warrior yellow kick the ass. Audiences
shout and scream in ecstasies, throwing bricks and stones and petrol bombs.
Crackling background music, drum beat bombing, bang bang gunning and,
is that you speaking foul language?

Crime, action, drama, thriller, I know this will be a great movie.
Don't you know you are the most cinematic director, Quentin Tarantino?
You depict the source of pride, inherence of humanity, and
the victory of democracy.

Star

by Sharon Hung

So
Bright
Are you
Constantly up there,
Looking down on those looking up to you.
To reach you is impossible, so
They stare, only stare
Because you
are never able to
blind them.



The Dark Side

Drinking & Driving

by Howard Lee

There were light rain patches
Amidst the empty street.
He hobbled over to a bench on the sidewalk.
He lost his share,
Placed his chips
On red when the run was black.
His breath was slow. He always
Bet against the run.
This only teased him of rich returns.
His lips quivered,
While striking a match
To light his cigarette.
A high screech
Followed by two beams of light
Interrupted his breath.
His vision was blurred
By thousands of angry eyes,
Piercing through his pupils.
His head was crushed by the
Cold steel grills of a jeep
As if it were a walnut shell.
His body thrown across the bench
And into a neighboring clothing store,
Smashing through the window,
Entering the display case,
And knocking over blank mannequins.

The Waitress

by Howard Lee

She was a single mom
With two kids and waitressed for the local bar.
Her hands smelled of beer and smoke
Each night after work,
And she safely tucked away her tips
Inside her back pocket,
As she exited out the bar's back door.

Arriving home,
She found that the TV was on
In the living room
And airing a marathon
Of late-night reruns of "The Andy Griffith Show".
A bowl of melted ice cream
Was left on the couch.
She was careful to be quiet
As she went to check on her children,
But even her soft steps
Made the wooden floors creak.
They were asleep in their bunk beds.

She missed their choir performance
Again this year, but tomorrow
She would take them to their
Favorite diner across the street
With the tips she safely tucked
Inside her back pocket.

The Apocalypse

by Lee Lampe

You're the big cheese
Back in the city
But back here you're a rat in the hole
And the cats are hunting you down

The Third World War will be chemical
I don't want to see it

You get caught in the eye of a tornado
And can't even feel a breeze on your face

Heaving, crying, choking, hyperventilating
Stomach locked in agonizing spasm

An exploding harpoon
Says nothing

It is a never ending typhoon
And there is no drainage

The world will never be the same again
Will we put all this crap behind us
Like it was the morning funnies
And we had it all wrong

A one decimal point mistake

Lucifer says...

by Michael Tsang

Ring the dinner bell! Wake up sleepyheads!
Everyone should get out of their dreary deathbeds.
Let's put on some music by some pointless living bands,
and none of you should gather in your own little clans.

Alright, as always, we'll start taking your bets,
but just as how you've fallen down, you cannot have regrets.
We don't need any president nor a prime minister,
only me, ladies and gentlemen, your dear funny banker.

To my left, to my right, to my front and to my back,
we've got church donations and paper money burnt black.
Our already-huge capital is endlessly on the climb,
so enjoy forever; you won't sleep a second time.

Don't get cross if the shouting gets too loud;
The only thing that you can do is to go with the crowd.
So smile at the pal beside, and that's for your own good,
for from now on, you are to pass your days as easeful as you could.



Moody Moods

Ajar

by Sharon Hung

An airy breeze
Got tickled
Brushing a flickering candle,
And Fizzled out cozily
Clinging to a swirling shadow.

Secret

by Emmy Chow

Autumn's bell tolls,
my secrets recalled,
the walk in the forest
alone, when I was fifteen.

fragrance of decay
sprinkled when leaves landed
on tip-toe
when the juke box was running
by the babbling stream.

Listen, over the bush, some
overwhelming human gasps
invite me,
my head turned
unawaringly.

Sizzling in their private log,
Bare skin rubbed against fallen leaves
clinging, grabbing, wriggling
two bodies working for relief

Mucus of leaves
and humans
glisten the mud,
moisten an awaken snake
in my mind,
moulting in thirst.

Father's Fish Tank

by Flora Mak

Father brought a fish tank home
on the day mom dumped his spare drills.
It hardly got through our narrow door.
It might be from a Chinese restaurant,
in which the bored chewy fish waited
to excite their lives scaring children away.

Father brought a fish tank home
and hushed the frowning me with his glare.
Since then, he drops his paint brush at six every day
to wander among the aquariums in Goldfish Street
and forgets his flat is crowded with three growing kids.

Father brought the fish tank home
and it is settled, at the door, no more objections.
He fills it with water and childish smiles
to himself. The electric water pump rhymes
with the chiming clock. When we sleep, mermaids
swear in our dreams. At night, I dream of myself drowning in the tank.

Father brought a bag of Koi home
and the lonely current comes to life.
It's going to bring fortune or money. Look!
The golden Koi jumped out of water
and the next day it died. That night

I saw Father sat before the tank with his empty rice bowl.

Father brought the fish tank home.
It is no longer a topic before or after meals.
We sit before the tank and watch
the only fish, a small goldfish, swims
and owns the sea

of peace.

Clouds (Haikus)

by Gabriel Wong

Cumulonimbus

Marshmallow kisses;
White washed as a jaded flake
Lightning in the heart

Cirrocumulus

Invigorated,
Foxtrotting swiftly across
ethereal floor

Cirrostratus

Annointed angels
Halo of icy crystal
Breaks Crestfallenly

Noctilucent

Strands of silky breath
Emanated from Aphrodite
Till the break of dawn

Little Delights in the CU Campus / and the Little nuisances...

by Eva Leung

Little Delights in the CU Campus

and the Little nuisances...

the music
of the approaching engine

the music
of the approaching engine
... but it passes without stopping

the silvery doors
sliding open

the silvery doors
sliding open
... but it goes up when you go down

the empty table
in the canteen

the empty table
in the canteen
... immediately taken

the empty seat
beside the cute classmate

the empty seat
beside the cute classmate
...right before the lecturer

blank faces in the examination hall

blank faces in the examination hall
... but the other pens
are shaking their heads feverishly

dismissal
before the long arm crawls to “3”

dismissal
before the long arm crawls to “3”
... the lecture on your favourite topic



Wordplays

Slutstation¹

by Gabriel Wong

Skål²,
 För³ the slut⁴ of an era
 Everything is bra⁵
 Mycket⁶ bra
 My lust⁷ till⁸ seeing you again
 Days pass in the fart⁹ of light
 Not full, inte ful¹⁰, my Gun¹¹
 Another glass¹² på¹³
 Your side
 Bad¹⁴ of wine
 Kyssar¹⁵, kylla¹⁶, känner¹⁷
 That there is a slut
 The prick of time
 Will stand like Bergman¹⁸
 Absolut¹⁹
 Skål.

¹ Terminal in Swedish

² Cheers in Swedish

³ For in Swedish

⁴ Very in Swedish

⁵ Good in Swedish

⁶ Very in Swedish

⁷ Pleasure

⁸ to in Swedish

⁹ speed in Swedish

¹⁰ Not ugly in Swedish

¹¹ A girls name in Swedish

¹² Ice cream in Swedish

¹³ by in Swedish

¹⁴ Bath in Swedish

¹⁵ Kisses in Swedish

¹⁶ Cool in Swedish

¹⁷ Knowing in Swedish

¹⁸ Mountain man in Swedish, Name of a
 Famous Swedish Director

¹⁹ Absolutely in Swedish, also a Swedish origin
 brand of Vodka

Creative Typing

by Flora Mak

White letters spread over a black background.

Hands crawling desperately on the plate,
weaving a bunch of loosened beads,

please wait

for the processed input come to their place.

Read aloud. Let's go backspace.

Clock ticks. Somebody is waiting. Which of you will come with which of you?

Insane.

Repeat the phrase.

Fingers jump from here and there, back and forth,
like the fleas on the hair unwashed for three days.

A dance of nothing, for nothingness is all. I wait
till the seven instructresses have shown a direction.

From "M" to "U" to "S".

Clock ticks.

Where the hell is the silent "E"?

speak / \$p34k

by Pierre Lien

sometimes at night,
his body is a monument,
seated on a plastic chair
in his jail, his room.

I, says the dusty clock,
yet the mouse is still clicking
frantically, as if morning exercises and afternoon nudges
were not enough.

his 2 eyes grew r3d like a bl00ming rose,
staring @t a screen of w0rds
that stares at h1m, "facebook", it reads
and he repeats, "f4ceb00k", h3 r3peats.

h3 r3ads ab0ut h1z frds: wh3re th3y R & h0w th3v b33n
and k33ps star1ng, as h1s fingerz daNce
On the keyboard, & in @ \$ymph0ni of cL1cks and cl@cks
h3 s1ngs h1z s0ng 1n a 1anguage kn()wn by men.

U R n0t @L0n3 my frd
I m h3r3 4 U

h1z 3y3s R n0w 9r0wing R3d,
R3dd3R, & MOR3 ch4rac73Rs R
Fl00d1ng the \$cr33n, & h3 b3gins t0
P@N1©, MOR3 & MOR3,
OF WH3TH3R H1Z
V1\$10N WILL COM3 BK & b NORML
or will he be warned of the severe effects
of sleeping late.



Journeys

Anticlockwise

by Eva Leung

Tsk

Tsk

Tsk

Tsk

Tsk

Tsk

Tsk

before the earth in Sichuan cracked

when oil was costly
but not as costly

when milk meant calcium
before the three deer galloped through the country

before the tsunami wiped out everything
drowning everyone

when you could go to the police station
without worrying you'd be raped

when graduation didn't mean unemployment

tock

tick

tock

tick

tock

tick

tock

Journey to the Botanical Garden

by Pierre Lien

I

your life was once white, like a christmas rose.
you never heard of a flowering onion, or a kangaroo paw.
now you know that they are here, waiting, for you.

II

you crawled into this botanical garden,
and you snatched a flame lily,
and you turned it blue.

III

the flowers are raising their hands for you.
they stand in perfect array,
waiting for you to praise them by their names.

IV

and so you name them: the slippers orchid that cannot walk;
the painter's palette that cannot paint; the sword lilies that never
fight. and you see them, walking, painting, sword-fighting, trying to impress.

V

you are visiting a military camp.
flowers are trained to exert no desires or disorders, no signs of fear or death.
their mission: to die, slowly, beautifully, impressively, for you.

VI

and when they had done their years, you'd pluck the corpses from the roots
and squish them in between the pages
for taxidermies.

VII

now every time you read this book,
you can find the dead piece of flower smiling at you
as if it is still alive.

bee dance

by Cecilia Chan

the bee is doing a helpless dance
drawn to a mis-targeted place to land.
restless, it flutters, it bounces, it leaps
its wings batter to hum out of tune.

the bee is dancing round a girl's black strands
which curtains her gaze, giving her space
to swim in the page and contemplate.

the girl is now roused to do a helpless dance
innocent to the bee's intent.
restless, she flutters, she dodges, she sways
she swings her thighs to prompt the bee to take flight
go look for a daisy patch
and leave these legs, denim-clad.

the bee refuses the girl's gentle pleas,
and insists on her company.
in the sun, flipping a page,
savouring a moment to contemplate,
the helplessly dancing bee
invites its unexpected self



Living Inanimates

Guitar

by John Zhong

We are two strings of the same body
Forever together, forever apart
We sing the two lines of the same song
Parallel but never across
Sometimes you vibrate and I silenced
And sometimes you silenced, I vibrate
Only the bars on score know what it means
That the true music is between lines
Only the bars between you and I

Twelve Ways of Looking at the Clock

by Winnie Chan

[I]

Fine black strokes, on a large, slightly yellow piece of paper,
Displaying every line and angle of the clock-tower —
Gazing at his outlined dream-clock, the designer
Lets a grin appear on his sleepy face, and is
Going to have a glimpse of the clock
In his dream of the night.

[II]

“What great modern art!”
“What a great new architecture!”
Passengers, and whoever comes near
And beholds, marvel at the clock, which is standing
High and steadfast on the top of the Central Star Ferry Pier,
With their fingers pointing, and their eyes and mouth gaped wide.

[III]

In front of the gleaming kerosene lamp, a photographer sits
Turning pages of his album and stops upon finding
The photograph of the clock on the ferry pier,
Exquisite black and white and gray —
And what if photographs can
Have colors one day?

[IV]

A father takes his
Boy, three months old now,
To the harbor, and says to him, “Look,
This is the world”, with a tender kiss on his brow.
The boy reaches up his little arms, and watches the clouds
Floating in the bright sky high above the clock on the ferry pier.

[V]

The morning is not as clear as expected — piles and puffs
Of grayness hanging below the zenith. But the boy,
A handsome young man now, in his white shirt,
Holding his newly brought briefcase, needs
To go across the rough sea. The clock
Strikes eight: the ferry departs.

[VI]

The Government has bellowed out
The death sentence of the clock-tower for
Concealing our history. After days of shouting in vain
In the shade of the pier and its clock-tower, on the scaffold,
Several staunch defenders, including the man, now forty years old,
Stand sternly and scatter to encircle the clock, though without a rod to fight.

[VII]

A photo of the clock-tower's guard standing on the scaffold, out of focus,
Found in an online journal called "Who Can Save Our Poor Clock?"
Written by his daughter — the sturdy figure is back-lighted by
The setting sun. Beneath it is a photo of the pallid clock:
A close shot; altered to grayscale; next to it are
The black words "It's dying for sure."

[VIII]

A seagull perches on
The edge of the clock-tower
Unnoticed. Has it got the faintest idea
Of what is happening to the very block-rock under
Its claws? The last run of the ferry before the clock stops
Has been scheduled. A sudden wind heaves its feathers, and it goes.

[IX]

Everyone there hears as it finally lets out its last chime:
 Stop the clock, bring out the whitish thick shroud,
 Let the executioners come . And so they come
 To remove the outworn thing, fragment by
 Fragment. They take it all away: it is
 Gone, leaving a sheer ruin.

[X]

Yes, it's gone, as announced
 By the newspapers, with the same
 Cold-colored image taken from different
 Angles and various distances, as though to prove
 The news — the clock's there nevermore; it is gone, gone
 Like vapor, gone like dust, gone like a woken dream, gone as it is.

[XI]

Who has ever wished to behold such sight — such wretched sight—
 Of the crumbled clock-tower in the midst of the putrid
 Mounds? The face of the clock is smeared and
 Cracked; the twelve spots on the circle
 Now bear similar queer, broken
 Numbers. Yet, never mind.

[XII]

All right. Never mind.
 Now, look: a newly cloned one
 Is already out there upon Central Ferry
 Piers 7 and 8, with its electronic bells chiming
 Twelve, and besides, the old clock is resting in peace
 In our history, in precious photos, and, perhaps, in bubbles of memories.

The Trolley

by Cynthia Wong

The trolley is crawling
down the street.

The trolley annoys everyone by its clashing sound of compartments
but it cannot hear its own noise.

The trolley keeps moving day and night
feeling neither the warmth of the sun nor the freezing night breeze.

The trolley has never dreamt of being anything else
it never sleeps.

The trolley cannot eat
but it has a desire for food.

The trolley has priceless treasure hidden its heart
where people put trash inside.

The trolley is too heavy to move faster than an old woman
who is too weak even to walk.

The trolley cannot keep up with time.
The wheels are turning too slow.

The trolley doesn't know what in front of it is.
It keeps chasing blindly.

The trolley doesn't know when it is going to stop.
There's not even a traffic light on the road.

The trolley is screaming
Aloud.

The trolley is still moving
but no one sees it.



“91 pianists, 115 capriccioso tunes derived from 115 titles”

Jantsen Tse

Department of Fine Arts,

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2009.