

# **H A L F W A Y   H O M E**

Hong Kong Tales for Children and Young Adults

DEPARTMENT OF  
**ENGLISH**  
CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG



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## **Introduction**

Three months ago, our course on Creative Writing for Children and Young Adults met for the first time. We were from different backgrounds with different experiences and different expectations. Some of us were majoring in English, others weren't; some had written stories before, others hadn't.

The only thing we had all in common was that none of us are native English speakers. Three months later we are able to publish our stories in this journal.

Writing a story is difficult enough when done in your mother tongue, but at least you have familiarity to help you along. However, writing in a language that keeps twisting away from you and absolutely refuses to bend into the shape you need?

Infinitely more difficult.

Still, the feeling of achievement is also greater because we manage to do what many English-native writers fail to do: we are publishing our stories.

However none of this would have been possible without our Professor, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, who showed us endless patience while correcting mistakes that English first graders know to avoid and giving us the right mix of criticism and encouragement so that our stories could become what they are today: the best that they can be.

## **Tales for Children**

## A Cat's Day

*Jeffrey Chan Cheng Ho*

I go into kitchen, and I see an eating bowl.  
The bowl is empty, but I am hungry.  
Oh! Something is wrong.  
So I turn around and speak out loud:  
"I need food and give me now!"



I go into the bathroom, and I see a water bowl.  
The bowl is empty, but I am thirsty.  
Oh! Something is wrong.  
So I turn around and speak out loud:  
"I need a drink and give me now!"





I go into the bedroom, and I see a giant bed.  
The bed is empty, and I am lonely.  
Oh! That is something sad.  
So I turn around and speak out loud:  
“I need you and come back now!”



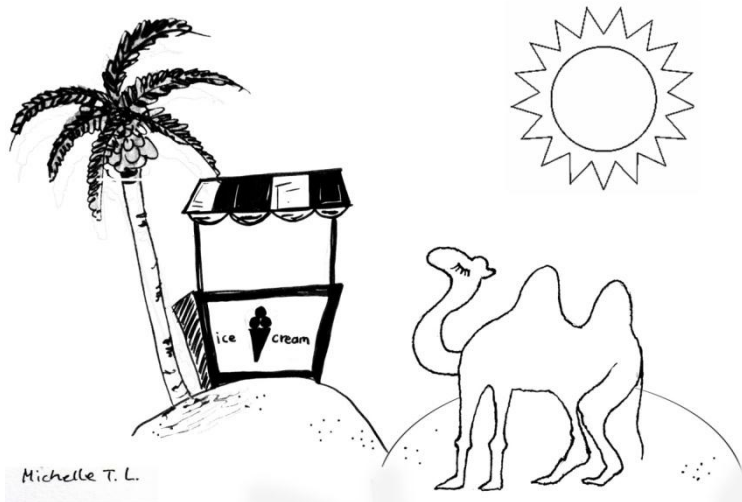
I hear a little voice, and I run to the front door.  
The door opens, and guess what?  
“Yes! Here you are, at last!”



## Cathy the Complaining Camel

*Michelle Tingco Leung*

There once was a camel who loved to complain.  
Complaining Cathy was her name.  
She would come last when the camels walked in a team.  
The others found her a rebellious teen.  
*Tsk! Tsk! Tsk!* When complaining, *tsks* were heard,  
She began to get on the other camels' nerves.  
*Argh . . . we there yet?* this camel would moan  
And sigh loudly each day after sunset alone.  
"I'm so thirsty!" one of the camels cried.  
"If Cathy won't hurry up, we shall all die!"  
"Let's leave her alone to complain in the Gobi!  
She owes all of us a sincere apology!"  
Cathy was frightened when she heard this plan. Indeed,  
She finally saw what a pain she must have been.  
"To camels and all, I say I'm sorry!"  
Then everyone saw that her eyes were teary.  
"Scurry along Cathy. You're forgiven, okay?"  
But hurry now, dear, for we don't have all day."  
"Look straight ahead!" the leader camel screamed.  
"There's the oasis! Let's get some ice cream!"



## Billy the Gecko

*Jess Wong Chui Lam*

I don't know why she's not back yet. Mama said she'd be here when I wake up. I'm awake NOW. Has she forgotten about me? It's so dark outside, maybe she's lost. I should go find her. But. . . but. . . it's really dark. I can't even see my own shadow out there. Come on. Mama said I should not be scared of the dark, so I stretch my limbs out to the unknown darkness one by one. Finally, I manage to leave my cozy Hole and am out on the rough freezing ceiling.

I have never left the Hole before. Every day I look out of the Hole to say hello to the shiny white Sticks on the ceiling. They are my friends. I like them a lot because they always keep Mama and me warm. But I do not recognize them now. They are not shining. I wonder if they are sick. Just when I am about to ask if they are feeling alright, I see a shade of mysterious red light on the wooden floor down below. It is very different from the light given out by the Sticks. I have never seen anything like it before.

One step at a time, I climb along the rugged path on the wall and land on the smooth wooden floor. The red light comes from a wooden altar that almost touches the ceiling. There are three cabinets and they are all giving out the red light. As my body becomes warmer, my breathing is also speeding up.

Oh no, there is a human in the middle cabinet! I climb away in a split second, just like what Mama teaches me.

Hold on, the Human is nothing like what she described. He is not throwing things at me or screaming.

"Maybe he cannot see me," I murmur and once again approach the cabinet. But he SEES me. He must have seen me. I can feel that he is watching me.

As I draw nearer, I notice something weird. He is smiling. Mama has never told me about human smiles. Maybe he is a friendly human and will tell me where Mama is. Very slowly I climb on the pyramid of oranges to talk to him.

"Hello, sir. My name is Billy." I wait for his reply patiently. But he does not move. Not even a muscle. Maybe he cannot hear me.

"I am looking for my Mama. She has dark skin and a long tail just like me, only bigger. Have you seen her around?" I raise my voice a little. But his smile, his pose, his silence remain. Maybe he cannot hear at all.

I stretch my forelimb to tap his shoulder to get his attention. His skin is cold and slippery like mine, but it's smooth like silk.

He still does not respond. His smile does not fade, but it feels like a mockery to me now.

“Why are you so rude?” I push him. Mama always answers me.

*BANG.* The Human falls to the floor. Transparent pieces of different shapes and sizes scatter on the ground. Their edges are as sharp as the proboscis of those noisy mosquitoes.

My tail is shaking. I have hurt the Human. *Bad Billy!* I climb down the oranges quickly to check if he is ok.

Not only is he not bleeding, but he is also smiling the same smile. He must be really strong and brave. “I’m so sorry. Please forgive me,” I whisper into his ear. But he does not respond. Maybe he is mad at me. What am I supposed to do? I wish Mama is here. She always teaches me what to do next.

Under the bright red light, my body is burning. I don't feel comfortable at all. I miss the Hole. Tears fill my eyes. No matter how hard I try to hold them back, they fall onto the Human. The tears darken the color of his teeth, his skin, and his clothes.

“Mama, Mama,” I cry out loudly.

“Is that you, Billy?” Her voice comes from the cabinet above. I climb along the curvy edge to the cabinet in the middle as quick as I can. When I am about to reach the middle cabinet, I see Mama’s waxy sweat. There she is, standing next to the vase.

“Mama!”

“I’m sorry it took me so long“, Mama gently strokes my head with her soft paw.

On our way back home, I tell Mama about the Human.

“That was a picture of a human who had passed away. . . ”

“It’s a ghost?” My eyes widen in shock.

“No, no, no, it’s just a picture. It has no life, so it can’t answer you,” Mama shakes her head with a heart-warming smile. “But it is still very, very wrong of you to push it. We should never hurt someone, no matter how rude he is.”

“Sorry, Mama.”

“Also, you should have stayed in the Hole. It is very dangerous for you to wander around alone.”

“I’m. . . sor-ry. . . Mama,” my tears are falling again.

“Billy sweetheart, stop crying and look around.” Mama kisses me on the top of my head.

I turn around. I see the cabinet where the Human was. I see the annoying white mouth which keeps blowing freezing wind towards us. I see the friendly Sticks which used to be bright. I don’t know what to look for, so I look at Mama.

“Billy, you’re not afraid of the dark now. You’re Mama’s brave little gecko,” Mama’s tail wraps around me.



Mama + 1999

## **Gordon the Brave**

*Jeffrey Chan Cheng Ho*

Once upon a time, there is a nice savannah with bright sunshine and endless green. Every animal takes this place as a paradise, except Gordon, a giraffe who is well-known among the animals because of his height and size. He is unhappy with his life. He thinks he does not belong to the place as he is far bigger than the others, and there is no way for him to show his strength. One day he leaves home and goes to the wilderness where no others have tried to enter.

His best friend, Dolly, a little deer, catches up to him. “Stop, Gordon,” says Dolly, “it is dangerous in there.”

“How do you know? Maybe that is a good place.”

“But why do you need to go?”

“To show my bravery.”

“What?” Dolly blocks Gordon’s way and asks, “What do you mean by showing bravery? I don’t think it is brave to enter the wilderness. It is unwise.”

“Leave me alone, please.” Gordon turns away.

“Wait!” Dolly follows him and asks, “Actually, do you think doing a dangerous thing is really brave?”

“Bravery is trusting in myself and my own strength. With it, I can do everything I want to do,” Gordon affirms. “Now, I want to enter the wilderness alone, and please don’t follow me.”

“But.....” Dolly doesn’t know how to reply. She stops and lets Gordon enter the forest alone.

The sunlight fades with Gordon’s steps. Shadows of the trees dapple Gordon’s body. The trees are strange and scary with distorted shapes. The groves are growing densely around, blocking Gordon’s way. The whole place terrifies Gordon.

“Be brave, be brave,” Gordon tells himself.

“Hello.” Suddenly there is a voice from behind. Gordon turns around and sees a beast he does not recognize. The beast looks like a cat but with a much larger size. His head is covered with brown hair, his body spotted, and his teeth are sharp as tacks. He says to Gordon, “Why are you here?”

“I’m just walking around.”

“Walking around?” The beast laughs. “Do you know why I’m here?”

“Walking around, too?”

“No, of course not. I’m here to eat you!”

The beast dashes towards Gordon. Gordon is frightened and runs away immediately. He runs as fast as he can, but the beast chases him.

“Oh, no!” Gordon is stuck in the tree branches. Whenever he moves, the branches scratch his neck. He cannot move, and he fears he must wait to be killed.

“It is my fault. . . Sorry, Dolly,” he says.

“Gordon!” All of a sudden, Dolly appears from the groves.

“Dolly? Why are you here?”

“It’s no time to talk.” Dolly jumps onto Gordon’s back and bites the branches around his neck. The branches are broken into pieces, and Gordon runs again with Dolly on his back.

But the beast also appears again! “Stop running, my lunch!” the beast shouts.

Gordon keeps running, and at last he reaches a high cliff. He stops and says, “This is bad. We will die here. . . I’m sorry, Dolly, I should have listened to you.”

“No, Gordon, you can jump to the next cliff,” Dolly says.

“It is too far away. I can’t make it.”

“You can do that, I believe you. So please show me your courage!”

“Courage?”

“Yes, let me tell you what my courage is. My courage is trusting in my friend. And with that, I can even lay my life down for him. It is because I know him. Now, jump!”

Gordon plucks up courage to jump.

“Ah!” Gordon and Dolly shout as they land on the next cliff.

“We made it! Thank you, Gordon. You are so brave!”

Gordon looks back at Dolly and smiles. Dolly has never seen Gordon that joyful before.

“Hey! Come back!” the beast standing on the other side says. “I won’t hurt you, I promise. Why do you need to run?”

“We are just walking around,” Gordon replies. “Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Giant Cat.”

The beast runs back, angry, to the forest and disappears.

“Mr. Giant Cat?” Dolly laughs, “It is a cheetah, the king of the wilderness. You didn’t even know that.”

“Oh, I didn’t know it. But now I know I am not the strongest. My large size cannot save me from danger. However, you, Dolly, saved my life. I’m glad to have you as my friend.”

“You saved me, too. I’m so proud of you.” They laugh happily.

When they return to the savannah, all the animals come to meet them. Gordon feels he now belongs there and he never wants to

leave again. After his story has spread, all the animals call him Gordon the brave.





## The Bee and the Fly

*Lily Yang Anqi*

Once upon a time, Miss Bee lived happily in the forest.

On a sunny summer morning, she came out of her hive to search for pollen. When she found a blooming flower, she landed on it, collected the pollen and carried it back home. She got this special recipe from her grandmother that taught her how to change the pollen to honey. It tasted as sweet as the sunlight in early May. It was her favorite food.

While Miss Bee was busying collecting pollen, she saw an insect flying nearby. “Who is that?” she wondered. The stranger was as large as her, but unlike her yellow striped clothes, the stranger’s dress was all black.

“Who are you?” Miss Bee asked. “I’ve never seen you before.”

The insect circled twice and landed on a petal. “My name is Mr. Fly!”

“Are you collecting pollen here? I think you should take a bath first. Look at your clothes! You’ll pollute the flowers.”

“You are so mean! I saw your kind before. You are a bee, right? You bees are always collecting pollen, as if your life goal is to move the entire garden to your home!”

“I’m saving the pollen for rainy days.”

“I don’t understand why you are collecting pollen every day. To me, food is everywhere. Carrying it home is so unnecessary.”

“Well, what do you eat then?” Miss Bee asked.

“All kinds of things! I’m too lazy to look for a particular food. I just eat whatever I see. Leftovers, dead fish, rotten meat. . .”

“Stop! Don’t tell me anymore! No wonder your clothes are so dirty. Your home must be as dirty as your clothes.”

“I don’t have a home. I’m too lazy to build one. I sleep wherever I want. Smelly toilet, wet drain, messy cowshed. . .”

“How disgusting!” said the bee. “How can you be that lazy?”

“How can you be that silly?! You’re wasting your time finding pollen and building your home.”

These words reminded Miss Bee of her work, so she stopped arguing with Mr. Fly.

Miss Bee continued collecting pollen and making her hive stronger until winter arrived. Winter came, and all the flowers disappeared. Miss Bee was not afraid. Her storehouse was full of honey, and her hive was warm and secure.

But Mr. Fly had not saved any food nor built a shelter. He flew everywhere to find something to eat, but everything was buried under white thick snow. Tired, hungry and cold, the fly went to a house where humans lived. It was very warm, and the family was having dinner.

Mr. Fly thought, “If you can see where I live in, you will envy me, poor Bee! My home and food are ten times better than yours!” He circled above the dinner table, trying to decide which dish to begin with.

But before he could make up his mind, a newspaper struck him with a heavy blow, and he died instantly.

## **The Smooth Little Snake**

*Sarah Schulz*

I crawled over the dank earth towards the large stone in the middle of the forest. It was cold and wet, but just over the stone the sun had broken through the leaves and lured me with the promise of warmth and dryness.

The climb wasn't easy from our side, but the cross adders lived on the other side where the climb was easier. When I reached the top, I found old gecko Gordon there. He muttered about the delicious worms that had come out with the rain, then ignored me.

I uncurled on the warm stone, stretching out in the sun that almost seemed to smile on me today. No wind anymore, no rain. Just the sun and the heat that would bring out the mice later for dinner. It was a good day.

Suddenly I heard a hiss from the other side.

"What are you doing here, Little Scale?" Sinuous asked. He was big and mean, thicker and longer than every snake on either side of the forest, although not as mean as Scarface.

I coiled myself, hoping that old gecko Gordon would help, but when I looked at his direction, I saw the tip of his tail vanishing over the edge of the stone.

"Go back to your side of the forest," Sinuous hissed.

"I am on my side," I replied before thinking.

He uncoiled, and rising to his full height, towered over me like a tree over a blade of grass. I was curled so tightly that I looked more like a mouse next to a fox. I was sure he was going to shove me over the edge of the stone when we suddenly heard the cry of a buzzard. Sinuous went limp immediately.

It was too late to escape. If I moved the buzzard would see me, had to see me, but if I stayed still, it might snatch Sinuous instead.

I barely dared to breathe. The buzzard would carry one of us away. If we had been on the forest ground, I would have been invisible. But I wasn't, so I could only hold my breath and hope.

The buzzard swooped down on us. Next to me Sinuous tried to be still as well. But he could still bite the buzzard if it grabbed him, and his adder poison was strong enough to kill.

My poison wouldn't be enough. I could only lie still in order to fool the enemy that I was part of the scenery. But not this time. Not for me.

I felt the claws closing around my middle. I tried to wind myself out of their grip, but the claws were unyielding. The tips were beginning to pierce my scales when there was a sudden, furious hiss. The buzzard screamed, and I flopped gracelessly back onto the stone.

“Little Scale?” Sinuous was still upright, keeping an eye on the buzzard that was flapping away from the wood. Two rivulets of blood were staining its plumage.

“Thank you,” I said timidly, confused from the fall and bewildered that a cross adder had just saved my life.

“Go home, Little Scale,” Sinuous hissed snidely as if nothing had happened.

I did as I was told silently, pondering that even cross adders sometimes could be brave and valiant.

Just as I slithered away, Sinuous added, “Don’t forget we are both snakes.”

And honourable, too, I decided, even if cross adders probably would never admit to it.



## **The Fox and the Hound**

*Connie Wong*

Once upon a time, far away in a green forest, there lived a fox and a hound who had been best friends for a long time. One day, they were playing in the woods when Hound asked Fox a question. "Do you think you're smart?" Fox did not answer. Instead, he asked Hound the same question.

"Smarter than you! You're only known for being sly!"

Fox was surprised by this reply but chose not to argue and asked Hound to lead the way back home. Hound was happy and confident and even did a little dance along the way.

Suddenly, out of the bush appeared a huge lion! Hound was frightened, lowered his tail and moved a few steps backwards. The lion was slowly circling them, licking his lips.

"We're not as fast as him. We can't outrun him. I thought you're smart. Can't you think of any ideas?" Fox asked.

The lion moved slowly towards them, his razor sharp teeth seeming to become bigger and bigger. Hound was terrified. He could not answer Fox.

"Watch me!" hissed Fox. "I'll show you how clever I am." With his head held high, he walked up to the lion.

"Your Majesty, I am arguing with my friend Hound here, and we need your advice as you are the cleverest animal in the forest!"

Listening to Fox's comments, the lion was full of himself and lay down on the forest floor to listen to their argument.

"I caught two chickens on my way home, and along the way I met dear Hound. I gave one chicken to him as a present, but he was not satisfied and wanted the other one as well. This is totally unfair. So, please, Your Majesty, please help me!"

The lion was only half listening, for he remembered the taste of tender chicken. He was thinking of a way to have the chickens, the fox and the hound for supper. Thinking up a trick, he asked, "Where is my foo. . . I mean, where are the chickens? I must see them for myself to give you a fair judgment."

"They're in my den. I will show you."

The three slowly walked to Fox's home. When they arrived, quick as a flash, Fox darted into his den. The lion thought that Fox was looking for the chickens, but Fox didn't come back for a long time. The lion was getting impatient.

Suddenly, Hound understood Fox's trick. "Your Majesty, Fox is a sly fellow. He might be lying to us and eating the chickens by himself!"

"Well, what are you waiting for? Get into the den and grab the chickens!"

Hound also darted into the den.

The lion waited and waited, but there was no sign of Fox or Hound. Realizing that he had been fooled, he roared loudly and tried to crawl into the den. But the entrance was too small. He heard laughter and cheers, as Fox and Hound celebrated their escape from his jaws.

"Your majesty, we have solved our argument, and we no longer need your help! Please leave!" Fox and Hound bellowed from the den.

The lion growled. Then, with slow steps and gurgling hunger, he walked away defeated.

## Roacherella

Jess Wong Chui Lam

In a dark damp alley beside Women Street, in a warm wet corner by the dumpsters, there was a kingdom. No one knew its name, but everyone had heard of its story.

Once upon a time, in this forgotten kingdom, there was a young female named Mei Roach. The darkest skin, the longest hair, and the slenderest limbs, her beauty outshone everything.

After her mother's early death, her father remarried Ms. Wickerby. Together with Ms. Wickerby's evil twin daughters, they lived in a comfortably dingy corner outside the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant. Unfortunately, happiness rarely lasts long.

One night Mei's father went hunting. He was riding on his gecko; suddenly, he was surrounded by a mysterious mist. As sharp as a pin, as fast as a bullet, the mist reached his heart and stopped it from ever beating again.

After Mr. Roach's hasty funeral, Ms. Wickerby showed her true colors. Every morning, Ms. Wickerby and the Evil Twins crawled into the restaurant and hid under the gigantic white bowl, where the sweet bubbly water was stored. They would lie there all day to watch humans fighting and kissing in a smaller black box on the wall. Before they left home, Ms. Wickerby always prepared a toothpick-long chore list for Mei. While they were making fun of the humans, Mei rushed around to scrub off mold, sew duvets and prepare meals. If the chores were not finished by the time Ms. Wickerby and the Evil Twins got home, Mei would sleep with a stomach noisier than that black box.

After a long day of work, Mei could only sleep in a cold small hole behind a leaking pipe. The water there was horribly clean and the lovely grease was nowhere to be seen. Despite her bitterness in life, she had the same sweet dream every night. In the dreams, she met a handsome prince at a grand ball. He was madly in love with her and proposed to her immediately. As much as Mei wanted to, she could not say "I do" because the dripping water always woke her up.

Worse still, the water washed away all her grease and dirt. None of the other cockroaches looked like her. Ms. Wickerby's Evil Twins even called her *Roachalien*. Although poor Mei was angry, she could only pretend not to hear them and keep working. In her heart she never stopped praying for her lovely layer of germs to grow again.

One day, when Mei was out seeking food, she ran into Nosy Mousy. Although she never really liked Nosy, Nosy always had the latest gossip to share.

“Mei, do you know someone moved into the alley?”

“How would I know? I’m never that far away from the kitchen.” Mei climbed down from a garbage bin with a bunch of fruit bits on her back.

“I heard they live in a beautiful castle.”

“Castle?”

“Yeah, I think they are royalty of some sort,” Nosy turned away.

“Tell me more.” Mei poked Nosy’s long pink tail with her sharp antennae.

“Ouch, ok. I bet they are one of you roaches. The doors to the castle are so tiny.”

“A Cockroach Prince?” A dice of apple fell out from Mei’s arms.

“I guess. Anyway, they are having this ball on Friday night. All are welcome, they said, but I don’t see how I can squeeze through those stupid doors.”

“Mei, where is my food? And what are you doing with this bully?” Ms. Wickerby popped her head out from the kitchen.

“Ma’am, Nosy was just telling me about the ball this Friday.”

“I guess everyone can prove itself useful sometimes,” Ms. Wickerby turned to Nosy.

“Thank you for that,” Nosy replied bitterly.

“It’s held by a Cockroach Prince, who is new in the alley.”

“We’re not sure if there will be a prince,” Nosy whispered.

“A prince? Interesting. Now get back to your work!” Ms. Wickerby shrank back for her magical black box.

In their cozy corner, Ms. Wickerby was helping the Evil Twins dress for the ball. Soft apple skins and smooth lemon skins wrapped their chubby bodies so tight that you could see their chests rising and falling. The sweet smell of apples and lemons danced around the room and gave Mei a headache, for she had nothing to wear to the ball although she had made a dress with bits and pieces that fell off the Evil Twins’ gowns.

“Maybe the prince will like me for who I am, not what I wear.” With that optimistic idea in mind, Mei asked, “Ma’am, may I go too?”

“Sure, if you can separate the salt from the sugar before we leave.” Ms. Wickerby pulled the apple skin tighter around her own waist.



Mei knew sorting the salt from the sugar was impossible, but she had to try. No matter how fast she sorted, she could not beat the clock.

“Still a long way to go? I guess we’d better be off,” Ms. Wickerby laughed.

Like a knife, the laughter stabbed Mei in her eyes. She was bleeding tears. Salt and sugar dissolved into one. Ms. Wickerby and the Evil Twins sneered and left Mei in the cold damp corner.

In hope of distracting herself, Mei banged on all the surrounding walls. “I just want to be happy! Is that too much to ask?”

“I guess not,” said a gentle voice from behind the pile of foam boxes.

“Who’s there?”

“I am Fairy Godmother,” Nosy Mousy climbed out of the foam box. “The legendary fairy that creates Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty.”

“No, you’re not. You’re Nosy Mousy,” Mei raised one of her antennae.

“You silly girl, I am a part-time Fairy Godmother. See? I have a wand,” Nosy twirled the gem-studded stick in her hand.

“For real? So can you send me to the ball?” Mei ran towards Nosy.

“Of course, that’s why I’m here.”

“Yay,” Mei clapped her limbs. “First, can you please give me a beautiful layer of germs and dust to cover my shiny skin? Oh, I also need a carriage with the strongest geckoes you can get.”

Nosy swung her wand. Blue stardust flew around and formed a sparkling tornado, lighting up the stygian darkness. When the tornado set, a blue gown was already wrapping itself around Mei’s body.

“What is this? Get this ugly thing off me. I look like one of those stupid fireflies.”

“Ugly? That’s Cinderella’s dress! Ok, fine, you can have whatever you want,” Nosy swung her wand again.

Instead of the blue dust, some green gooey jelly fell, turning into a germ gown. Not everyday germs, but the highest quality ones used in human laboratories. Mei sprinted to a pond by the leaking pipe to admire the dress. Grey dust balls were sewn all around the skirt. It was the most spectacular gown Mei had ever seen.

“Remember, you must be back by midnight.”

“No way, it’s ten to eleven already.”

“Humans are so much easier to please,” Nosy Mousy sighed.

Quickly, Mei climbed into the luxurious matchbox coach and fastened the seatbelt. She counted every hair on her limbs until she finally arrived at the legendary castle.

“At last!” Her antennae shook.

The palace was breath-taking. The doors on every side were not like those gigantic selfish doors for humans but tiny ones for cockroaches. Stepping out of the carriage, Mei thought to herself, “Look how symmetrical and artistic the arches are. The Prince must be a handsome roach with incredible style.”

Elegantly, Mei approached the castle. The closer she got, the more she could tell about the royal family that lived there. She could smell the feast waiting. Saltier than soy sauce and sweeter than bubble tea, it was nothing like what she had smelled before. “They must have excellent taste in food.”

She heard the lively sound of Mozart’s and Bach’s music, the cheery chatter of the guests, and loud laughter too. From her observations, Mei imagined that the Prince must excel in every aspect.

All of a sudden, the laughter turned into screams. Among the screams, she recognized the voices of Ms. Wickerby and the Evil Twins.

“Help, mother, we can’t move!”

“Argh, what is happening?”

“I’m stuck, I’m STUCK,” screamed Ms. Wickerby.

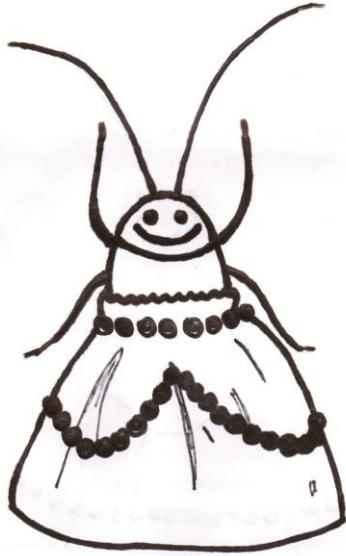
Something terrible was happening. She rushed to the entrance of the castle, and then froze. Before her dozens of cockroaches and hundreds of ants were struggling to escape.

Just when Mei was about to scamper away, she saw a portrait of the Prince on the castle wall. Strong limbs, long antennae and a heart-warming smile. He was the one in all her dreams.

“Wait a minute, why is he upside down?” Mei said aloud.

This was not a castle, but a roach hotel! There was no handsome prince looking for love, only heartless plastic tapes looking for prey.

Mei fled, vowing to never trust a mouse or a part-time fairy godmother ever again.



|oss

## Escape from the Circus

*Angela Cheung Wing Yu*

There is a little mermaid kept in a circus. She has the eyes of the sea, the hair of the night and the lips of the coral. She always wears a pair of pearl earrings which are as pure as her heart. She has a blue tail but she does not know what it is for. She has been kept in a tiny tank. Her Master, Mr. K, gave his little mermaid a name, Melody, for her angelic voice.

Mr. K owns a famous circus in the town of Merrylane. Its show is second to none, and it is only held on the first day of summer, which is TONIGHT.

Clonk, clonk, clonk. . . Mr. K knocks on the tank to wake Melody up and he feeds her with sea bubbles.

“Thank you, Master,” Melody kisses his hand.

Mr. K smiles and holds her chin. “My little mermaid, you are happy here, right?”

“Yes, Master,” Melody nods.

“Sing for me, my little mermaid, sing,” Mr. K asks, just like he does every morning.

Melody sings,

“Once upon a time, there was a little mermaid  
Yearning for the mysterious world upon the sea.  
When her lover comes, she follows him to see  
The world upon the sea.  
She does not regret the storms along the way.  
Her love blossoms, but he goes away.  
Love is too beautiful, and it decays.”

“Excellent, my little mermaid, you have such a beautiful voice. Are you ready for your first show tonight?” asks Mr. K..

“Yes, Master,” smiles Melody.

“My little secret, you will be my super star!” Mr. K claps his hands.

After Mr. K leaves her, Clowny tiptoes into the room. Clowny is her first and best friend in the circus. Every day he visits to tell her about the world outside. He knows about everything--the sky, the sea, the stars, the town and the laughter of children.

“I know this song, Melody. It tells the love story of your ancestor, the Little Mermaid. This song commemorates her bravery but also her misery.” Clowny sighs.

“Yes, the Sea Witch tells us her story and teaches us love is not good as it only brings death.”

“Oh, is it what you think?” Clowny lowers his eyes.

“I don’t know, Clowny. I don’t know what love is.” Melody smiles as she teases him.

Clowny shivers, “Melody, are you excited about your first show tonight? You are going to shine with your sweet voice.”

“It’s ok. I love singing, but I don’t want to be a super star. I just follow Master’s commands. Oh Clowny, isn’t it time for your practice? Go now or Master will punish you!” Melody frowns.

“I don’t want to practice anymore. I don’t want to put on make-up and wear a face for someone else!” Clowny clenches his fist.

Mr. K rings the bell and hurries everyone to get ready to show him their tricks.

“Oh no, Clowny, please go now,” Melody pleads.

Clowny wishes Melody a good show and dashes out of her room.

“A splendid time is guaranteed for all!” Mr. K looks at his circus with pride. Mr. K always looks good in his suit. He wants to be especially perfect for tonight.

TONIGHT!

Outside the tent, music strikes as the band parades.

“In the name of Mr. K, there will be a show tonight in the circus tent. Springing Twins will be there. Flying Jumbo is also there. What a scene! Harry the Royal Horse will dance the waltz. Clowny will collect all your Queens.”

The children in Merrylane gather around the tent to watch the parade. They have long heard about the wonderful Mr. K.’s show.

“The show starts at six, don’t be late!” the drummer tells the crowd.

Inside the circus tent, the rehearsal is going on. Springing Twins are dancing in the air like two butterflies. Flying Jumbo is trying to do ten somersaults in the air. Harry the Royal Horse is practicing his signature turns. Clowny is putting blood-red lipstick on his lips and mumbling his knock-knock jokes. But he cannot stop thinking about what Melody told him this morning.

“Who is this? How ironic!” Looking at himself in the mirror, Clowny is tired of the ridiculous grin on his face, especially when he does not feel that joyful.

“Clowny, I think you are ready for the rehearsal.” Mr. K crosses his arms.

“Yes, Master.” Clowny immediately goes on the stage.

He climbs on the back of Harry, stands straight on the running horse and juggles. One, Two, Three, Four. . .

A little boy appears from nowhere and blocks the way.

Bang! Harry makes a crashing halt, and Clowny falls hard.

“You sneaky little thing! What are you doing here?” Mr. K shouts at the little boy. “Are you stealing anything from me? Come here or I will lock you up.”

“No, no, Sir. I want to watch your show, but I don’t have the money for a ticket,” the little boy cries, wiping his tears with his torn sleeves.

Mr. K checks the boy’s pockets but finds nothing. He kicks him out of the circus, as the poor little boy cries loudly.

Clowny moans. He has hurt his legs.

“Clowny, be prepared, the show must go on,” Mr. K orders.

Clowny did not care. He hobbles away and asks the Springing Twins where Melody is.

“Oh, Clowny, what bad things have happened to you?” Melody gasps when she sees his painful face.

Clowny tells her about the accident. Melody begs him not to perform.

“Don’t worry, Melody, I am fine. I can stand on one leg,” Clowny says cheerfully, happy that Melody is worried for him.

Melody is still concerned. “The pain will kill you. You need to rest. Let me talk to Master, he will understand.”

Mr. K rings the bell again.

“Hurry up, Clowny, Mr. K is coming,” Jumbo rushes in, followed by Mr. K who yells, “Clowny, get ready right now!”

Clowny hops to the back stage.

Mr. K turns to Melody and says, “My Melody, wear this. You will be the diamond of tonight.” He puts a diamond-crusted hair clip on her silky hair. “My super star, how beautiful you are!”

Melody’s mind is on Clowny and his wound. Everything Mr. K says annoys her. She throws away the hair clip and pushes his hand away.

“Master, I respect you very much, but it is wrong to ask Clowny to perform when he is hurt, and you were so mean to the poor boy who wanted to watch our show.” Melody sounds determined. She flips her tail, stirring the water in the tank. She is surprised as she had never ever moved her tail.

“Are you teaching me a lesson? Remember, I am the Master here.” Mr. K grabs her arm.

“What if I leave? You are not my Master if I leave. You will no longer own me and I will owe you nothing.”

“Leave me? How dare you? You think you can survive without me? How much do you know about the outside world?” Mr. K twists her tiny arm.

“The outside world may be dangerous, but a place with no kindness and mercy is not where I want to stay. I am weak, but I will seek for a place for myself. I will perform tonight, and then you will let me go.” Melody shakes off Mr. K’s hand which leaves a bruise on her arm.

“Crazy!” Mr. K smirks. “You are going nowhere but this tiny tank. You will sing for me, accept this and love it because you find yourself useful here. Now, the show must go on. You know your part.”

Melody’s heart fills with anger. She is not just fighting for Clowny but for herself too. If peace cannot be made, they will run away before Mr. K notices.

It is ten to six.

Inside the circus tent hangs the dim lights. The children are eating candy floss while waiting for the red curtains to open.

Backstage, Melody tells her friends about her plan to run away and asks if they wish to join her.

“But, Melody, we have never lived outside the circus. There are so many unknown dangers!” the Springing Twins shake their heads together.

“Yes, Melody, it is hard to make a living outside. I don’t know if I can have the nice carrots that I have here,” Harry the Horse sniffs.

“But we have never tried. Maybe we can do it for our own freedom.” Clowny is already packing his bag.

“Great! I will join you. I have always wanted to fly in the real sky. The tent is too small for me.” Jumbo flaps his ears.

“Let’s wait no longer. Goodbye, everyone!” Clowny, takes Melody and her tank and rides on the Flying Jumbo.

Jumbo flaps his ears like a pair of wings and escapes through the back door. Jumbo flies across the real sky, and for the first time he feels that the world is boundless. He can do as many somersaults in the air as he wants. He keeps flying until they reach the seashore.

“Melody, you can now go back home,” Clowny cheers.

Melody jumps into the sea, finally feeling she is where she belongs. She sings, and a group of mermaids put their heads out of

the water and sing in response. Their voices are as sweet as hers. She has found her kind.

Clowny wants to say something to Melody, but he holds his words. He is pleased to see she is so truly happy. Most importantly, he can cheer people up with his true face now.

A red star hangs in the dark sky. Melody follows her new friends back to the undersea world, and Clowny and Jumbo go on an adventure to the furthest East and the furthest West.

When the red star rises again, Clowny, Jumbo and Melody will meet to share what they have seen. They all look forward to this day.



## **The Magic Pail**

*Connie Wong*

Once upon a time, there lived an old billionaire in the Forbidden City. He was in charge of collecting taxes from the villagers and he was very wealthy. He was famous for being stingy and mean. Some beggars who hadn't eaten for three days and nights came to him for food, but without blinking an eye, he threw a dirty pail of water at them and forced them to leave.

"Lousy beggars! I order you to leave at once!"

Hing was a poor farmer's daughter who had been sold to the old man as a servant. The old man was always picking at the girl. Even though she washed his clothes perfectly, he would still demand that she wash them in the river again; he wouldn't allow Hing to eat if he thought the house wasn't perfectly clean. She never answered back but continued with her chores. One day, the old man was having a temper fit again because the chickens that Hing had fed were too skinny.

"Why are my chickens so scrawny? Did you not feed them every day? No food for you today!"

The old man had used all the taxes he had gathered to buy luxury items and had bought cheap grain for the chickens. Again Hing did not speak and quietly fed the chickens. Suddenly an old lady passing by asked for some food. Of course, the old man who was counting his money would not allow the old lady to eat his food. After the old man left the house, Hing gave the old lady a drink and even offered her the last piece of bread that she had. The old lady was touched and she handed Hing a bucket of water.

"Hing, you are such a nice girl. To repay your kindness, here's a present for you. Wash your face with the water in it every night. But remember, don't allow anyone else to use it."

Hing looked down at the pail and her heart was filled with joy. The pail was the first present she had ever received and she wanted to express her gratitude. But the old lady had gone in a flash.

Every night, Hing washed her face as the old lady had instructed. Whenever she washed her face, she became more beautiful.

The old man was amazed by the change in her looks and was eager to know how she did it. He hid in a corner to learn her secret. "I have loads of money, but I'm getting older day by day. If I can get that bucket of water, I will be handsome and young again."

He waited for Hing to do her usual chores and when she was at the market, he stole the bucket of water and hid it in his room. As he saw his reflection in the water, he impatiently splashed and splashed water on his face.

The more water he used, hair started sprouting there, and his ears began growing longer and his body shorter! He had turned into a pony! The old man was so ashamed that he ran into the woods and was never to be seen again.

Hing continued living in the old man's house. Instead of doing chores, she took over the handling of the wealth that the old man had left behind. She handed out money to the villagers when needed and everyone was happy.

Now, my dear children, do not start splashing your face with water every day. Magic doesn't work like that. But if you do good deeds and help people in need, who knows, I might just be around the corner to hand you a bucket of my very special water.

## **The Hunter and the Heartless Queen**

*Sarah Schulz*

Once upon a time there was a hunter like no other. He had slain the Ziz when it had blocked the sun and saved a village from the Ala that led hail and thunderstorms onto the fields to ruin the crops. He grew so mighty and fearsome that all the beasts in the shadows feared his step.

One day he decided to prove himself the greatest hunter of all time by killing the Indrik, the king of all animals that lived in the Holy Mountain where no other foot may tread. The hunter took his bow and the arrows he had carved from the branches of an Elder tree, fletched with the Ziz's feathers that could kill every creature, and made his way to the Holy Mountain.

But the Indrik was protected by the Wild Man, the father of the forest, and as soon as the hunter set foot on the Holy Mountain, the Wild Man appeared before him, breaking his bow and burning his arrows.

He cursed the hunter, "You shall not find rest, honour, glory or love from this day on until the sun rises in the west and sinks in the east."

"Have mercy!" the hunter cried. "I only seek to protect my kind as you do yours."

"That may have been your intent once upon a time," the Wild Man replied, looking into the hunter's heart and finding the truth there, "but you have lost your path. However, I shall give you mercy. If you gain the heart of the heartless queen who is yet to be born, you shall be free of my curse."

The hunter made his way back to his village. No one recognised him or remembered the many times he had saved them, so he moved on, serving as a soldier for many kings in many wars. He saw enough death and blood to make him sick, but rest eluded him. He could stay nowhere long because his old eyes looking out of a young face made people uneasy and fearful.

After ten seasons he found the heartless Queen. She was the most beautiful woman in all the empires of the world. Everyone loved her but they were all driven to despair and death, for a dybuk, an evil spirit escaped from hell, had stolen her heart so that she could never return anyone's love.

The hunter was not spared from this fate. Young and strong, he became her personal guard, but because she had no heart, he stirred no feelings in her, neither good nor bad. He saw that the Wild Man

had tricked him as forest spirits often do, for a heartless queen could not possibly give her heart to a love-sick hunter.

On the long nights of winter when people huddled around the fires and told stories, the hunter was told about the dybuk that had stolen the queen's heart. Rest still eluded him, and so he bade farewell to the queen, but she barely noticed his leaving.

He travelled beyond icy seas and vast forests until he found the dybuk. With the queen's heart it had taken the appearance of a girl, but rumours followed it because its looks did not change with time.

"You have something that doesn't belong to you," the hunter said.

"What do you mean, sire?" it asked with an innocent voice.

"My Queen's heart," the hunter answered, grabbing the dybuk. It kicked and scratched against his grip, using its childlike appearance to call for help.

No one dared to stop the hunter with his unsettling old eyes nor did they care for the eerie girl.

The hunter brought the struggling dybuk away to kill the creature and send it back to hell where it belonged.

"Please, have mercy!" the dybuk screamed. "I will give you the heart but don't send me back!"

"Why should I?"

"It is hell. You should know what eternal punishment feels like." It crouched down at the hunter's feet, offering the stolen heart to him.

The hunter was weary of shedding blood, even that of such a vile thing as this one. He took the heart and buried the dybuk at the crossroads, so that when it emerged it would not know which of the roads to follow in order to seek vengeance on the living.

The hunter returned to his queen who came down to meet him.

"It hurts," she told him.

"Where?" he asked.

She took his hand and laid it over her chest where her heart was beating fast. "I know you," she said, "I saw you in my dreams. You were waiting for me."

"Ten seasons," he answered.

"Then you have waited long enough." She took his hand and never let go again.

## Miss Qing, the Cinderella in China

*Lily Yang Anqi*

Once upon a time, a girl was born to a wealthy family. On the same day, the prince of this kingdom was also born.

Time flew. When Song Qing, the little girl, had her tenth birthday, she was already the most beautiful girl in town. No one had ever seen such a pretty and adorable child. Everyone who saw her said, “You’ll grow up to be the bride of the prince!”

The girl, however, was not happy, for her mother was very weak. Qing knew her mother was dying, but her mother comforted her, “Don’t cry, my child. Everything will be all right.”

Finally, on a cold winter morning, her mother left Qing forever.

When spring came, her father, Mr. Song, married a widow from the neighbouring town, Meixiang. The second Mrs. Song moved in with her two daughters. Three months later, Mr. Song left the town for business, and asked his wife to take care of Qing. But the stepmother was hypocritical and cruel. When news came that Mr. Song had died, she drove Qing out of her room and burdened her with endless housework.

The poor girl had to stay in the kitchen all day in her tattered clothes. No one mentioned that she could be the bride of the prince ever after. Instead, people called her Hui, as her clothes were always covered in dust.

Some years late, Qing heard from the maids that the king had announced that he would hold a feast to celebrate the prince’s eighteenth birthday. This grand party would last for three days, and the prince would choose the prettiest and best dancer at the feast as his bride on the last.

The two stepsisters were excited by the news. They asked Qing to do their hair and prepare their clothes. She obeyed, but when she saw her dust-covered face in the mirror, her hands stopped.

“Daydreamer!” her elder step-sister laughed. “I know you are dreaming of going to the feast with us. But look at your face!”

Finally they left for the feast with their mother, leaving Qing alone at home.

The poor girl cried. She washed her face and looked again in the mirror. No one would disagree that it was a beautiful face. She remembered the days when the neighbours praised her as the most beautiful girl in the kingdom who ought to be the prince’s bride.

Qing went to her mother's tomb and prayed. When she opened her eyes, a fairy appeared in front of her.

"Poor girl," she said, "I heard your wish and decided to help you, for you are such a sweet and beautiful girl. I will help you go to the palace. However, you must return before midnight."

Then the fairy turned into a flash of light. Qing closed her eyes. When she opened them again, the fairy had disappeared, and her worn clothes had turned into a dancing costume, with embroidery made of silver and gold thread. She touched her head and discovered that her hair had been perfectly done.

"I'm so lucky!" she thought and ran to the palace without hesitating.

However, the way to the palace was long. By the time Qing reached it, a long queue of guests blocked the entrance. Many were girls of Qing's age, all in beautiful dresses and with fashionable hairstyles. Qing stood at the end of the queue and waited. The palace was so crowded that the queue moved slowly.

Towards midnight, she saw the prince at the window. "What a handsome young man!" she thought. "I shall dance for him and be his bride!" Just then the bell pealed, and Qing had to hurry back home.

The next day, the stepsisters laughed at Qing again before going to the feast. Qing was upset, not because of her sisters' rudeness, but because she didn't have the chance to dance with the prince. She had already seen the splendid feast, the happy crowd and the handsome prince yesterday. How could she forget them? Only one step further and she could have had the chance to dance with the prince!

She went to the backyard and prayed by her mother's tomb again. A moment later, the fairy did show up.

"Poor child," she said, "you were truly a goddess in that dress yesterday! Even the moon envied you, for your beauty made the moonlight fade. However, if no one sees you dance, the dress will be in vain."

"Then what shall I do? There were thousands of girls there yesterday, all in beautiful clothes. I had to wait at the end of the queue the whole night!"

"I'll give you a coach, but remember to come back before midnight." The fairy disappeared in a flash of light.

Qing jumped into the coach. No one drove it, but it seemed to know the way, and soon, Qing found herself at the entrance of the palace. This time she was early enough to be invited in.

"What a gorgeous place," she thought. However, the girls were even more beautiful than those she saw yesterday. She performed her

dance only once, for the other girls were equally beautiful and skilled. Towards midnight, Qing went home disappointed.

On the third evening, Qing went to the tomb again, discouraged. She had tried her best and reached the palace on time, but still she could not compete with the other girls.

The fairy appeared again. "Don't be sad. I'll help you one more time."

"I seemed so common among those ladies yesterday. Maybe I am a daydreamer."

"Don't worry, my girl. Look at this." With these words, the fairy's hands glowed, and a pair of glass shoes appeared.

"They are beautiful!" Qing exclaimed. But a moment later, she was upset again: "But how can it help me to stand out among the girls? My feet will be completely hidden under the dress."

"Yes, no one will see them. But the important thing is that you own them, not that you are showing them off to others."

The coach drove even faster than the night before. When she entered the palace, she felt a force supporting her from the feet, making her steps lighter. She had never felt so confident. Everyone in the hall was amazed by her elegant appearance and graceful steps. The prince was so enchanted that he asked her to perform all night. "She will be the prince's bride!" people said to each other.

Qing was so happy that she forgot the time, until the bell struck midnight. Hearing the sound, she suddenly remembered what the fairy had said, and left the palace quickly. No one caught her, but she lost one of the glass shoes.

The next morning, the prince announced that he would visit every girl in the kingdom, and the one whose foot fit the glass shoe would be his bride. Qing was very happy because once the prince recognized her she could say goodbye to her poor life forever.

On the third day after the announcement, the prince finally found the one who could wear the glass shoe, and they married on a lucky day. However, the bride was not Qing but a girl from Meixiang. When the new couple paraded on the street, Qing saw the bride. Even she had to admit that the bride was more beautiful than her.

The prince only paid attention to his wife, but a royal guard recognized Qing. He proposed to her, and she accepted. They lived a happy life.

One day her husband asked her, "Do you ever regret that the prince did not recognize you?"

Qing shook her head. "You see, this kingdom is China. In such a huge empire, no matter how hard you try, there's always someone

who is better than you. That is the most common outcome in life. I have learnt to accept it.”





## **Tales for Young Adults**

## **R2-D2 in Hong Kong**

*Jeffrey Chan Cheng Ho*

A long time ago in Mong Kok, I worked in a computer shop. My co-workers called me R2-D2 as I was short and reticent. One day, my boss, Leia, told me, “Go! Find Ben and tell him to pay the bill; otherwise, we will have to close down!” She was nervous as our shop was facing a big financial crisis. As I was. I was also worried about my salary.

She took me on a ferry and dropped me off on Lamma Island, a remote place in Hong Kong. I found Ben in an old beach house, and he was with a teen called Luke. When I told Ben about the crisis in our shop and that Leia needed Ben to pay his bill now, I saw sorrow in Ben’s eyes.

He said, “May the Force be with her. I don’t have the money.” For sure, he couldn’t pay the bill. However, Luke was willing to help, for one reason: Leia was beautiful. Luke convinced Ben to return to Mong Kok to help Leia, and we could leave at last.

Ben said he wanted a quick transport. So we met Han, a crazy seaman. Han brought us to his little wooden boat which he said was the fastest vessel in Hong Kong.

“Here we go!” he said, and we crashed immediately.

In the water, Ben exclaimed, “May the Force be with us!”

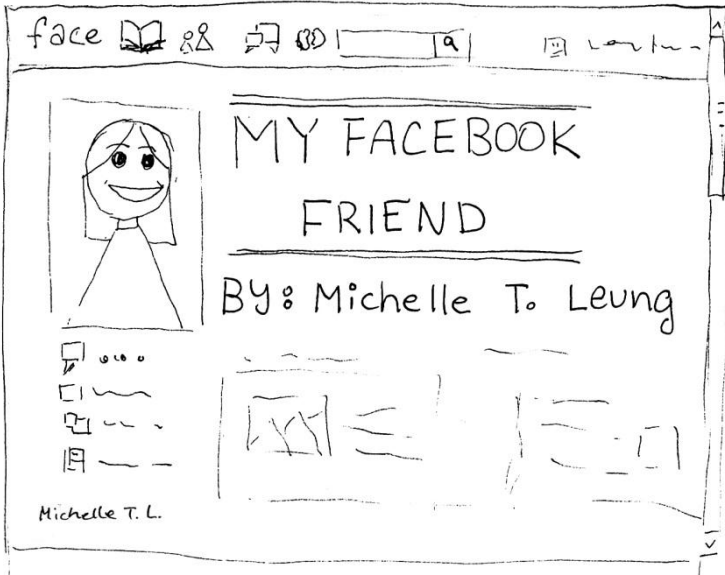
This time he was right; the police force was with us. We were arrested.

In the police station, we were locked up while the police investigated the accident. Han’s boating days were certainly finished, and we were all glad to see him in prison before he killed someone or himself. However, Luke was impatient and ordered me to hack the police computer system, so as to get us out quickly.

I replied, “Oh, forget it. May the Force be with you.”

**My Facebook Friend**  
*Michelle Tingco Leung*

I had a friend who was seriously hooked  
To a little website we call Facebook.  
She'd log in each day just to take a look,  
Reading news feeds more than real books.  
Her friends looked at her and their heads shook.  
They said, "Girl, you ought to get off the hook".  
She listened to them, and their advice she took,  
Guess where she announced it? Indeed, on Facebook.

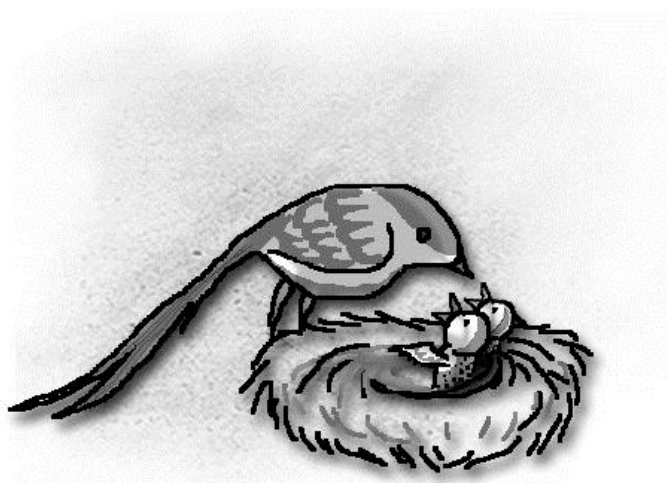


## Swiftlet

*Angela Cheung Wing Yu*

Sing like the seasons will never fade  
Steaming the broken nest  
Softening the steel-like branches,  
Tears stewing the sweetness.  
What goes on the table is my essence.  
Sing and sing and sing the coldness  
Fly and fly and fly to the sky  
And return with a bowl of taste.  
Dream and dream and dream of a home  
Build and build and build a shelter.  
Wearing a feather of black  
Mouthing the white  
Collapse for your savour.  
Sing and sing and sing the indifference  
Fly and fly and fly to the lights  
And return with a bowl of taste.  
Dream and dream and dream of a home  
Build and build and build a shelter.  
Crystallizing into a cup of longevity  
I'm fearless, so pure is my determination  
Although I smell the danger.  
I sing and sing and sing the cruelty  
Fly and fly and fly to freedom  
And return with a bowl of taste.  
Dream and dream and dream of a home  
Build and build and build a shelter

If scars are cured  
Silence is voiced  
And sweetness is shared,  
It is an honour.  
Sing and sing and sing to the sun,  
Fly and fly and fly to the heavens.  
Why do you forget me?



## Midnight Train from Hung Hom

*Jess Wong Chui Lam*

It was five to midnight on a Monday night. After a long day of lessons and project meetings, my mind felt separated from my body. All I wanted to do was to drag my hollow yet heavy shell home.

The train to Sheung Shui is always occupied by over-energetic mainland tourists. Space could rarely be found, let alone seats. Luckily the train travelled in a circular route, so I took the train to Hung Hom hoping to find a seat.

The moment I walked into the car I spotted an empty double seat by the window. The soothing steel seat caused my body to collapse and my eyelids to drop. Suddenly, forgetting my dream I was awakened by the sudden stop of the train.

A man in his early twenties was sitting beside me.

I did not hear the doors or the comforting voice of the broadcast. In the deserted car, we were the only passengers. An unsettling feeling bubbled inside me. Slowly, the train pulled out of the station. I noticed the man's reflection on the glass. His skin was smooth and translucent like the glass over a crystal ball, and silver hair shone under his black bowler hat. A black silk tie matched his five-button blazer. He did not look like he belonged in this era. I felt his gaze on my reflection and my ears and neck burning. I immediately turned my face to the window.

A funeral home stood alone amidst thick fog like a castle surrounded with steep cliffs. The weak grey light that illuminated the building seemed to be mourning for the deceased. The train made an abrupt stop right in front of the funeral home whose appearance chilled me.

I looked for some distraction, which was hard to find with only two passengers in the car. The news report was all I heard.

"A coffin was found buried under Kowloon Park today..." The anchorwoman's voice echoed in the car.

"Lovely place," the man said, staring at the screen.

"Sorry?"

"There," he pointed to the screen with a cane.

I pretended not to hear and searched my purse for my phone. As I was about to take it out, the lights in the car went out. Only the light outside the funeral home lit the train. Wind and fog rushed in from nowhere, and I lost warmth and vision. The anchorwoman was replaced by an irritatingly sharp blue background with white digits.

The digits jumped restlessly as if they were racing with my heartbeat.

Minutes later, the lights came back on, only much dimmer. When I finally managed to catch my breath, something stopped it again.

On the straight ironed pants rested a pair of skinny wrinkled hands. The nails were so long they coiled into loops. The bottom of my skirt was soaked. I looked down and found muddy water pouring from the man's black leather boots into every corner of the compartment.

Terrified in case I provoked the man in any way, I cautiously exited to the next compartment. It also was vacant and filled with mud. I ran through compartment after compartment and they were all the same: the mud, the funeral home, the blue screens. I felt like I was running in circles, for the driver's cabin was nowhere to be seen.

I could not run anymore, so I sat at a single seat by a window and tried to call someone for help. But the only response I got was: *No Signal.*

*Cluck!* The train resumed its journey. The funeral home was finally out of sight. Before the neon signs in Mongkok could appear, I rushed to the nearest door, anticipating a way out. However, when the train pulled up by the platform, nothing happened. No broadcast. No exit. I checked the doors in the next compartment. They were all shut.

I pushed the emergency button in despair.

"Hello, ma'am," said a man from the other end of the intercom.

"Hi, I'm trapped in. . ." It was his voice! In disbelief, I backed away from the intercom and bumped into someone.

"Help," I turned and grabbed that person's bony arm.

"Only if you'll help me."

Horror overtook me. It was him.

Before I could escape, he wrapped his fingers around my wrist and lifted me up in mid-air.

"What do you want?" I kicked as hard as I could, but I could not hurt him.

"Food," he pulled me closer.

His rotten breath was cold as ice. It froze my muscles. When his sharp yellow teeth were about to pierce my neck, something fluttered inside me. My stomach flattened, my chest raised, my throat burnt. *Not now.* I stopped my breath to hold it, but I could not.

*Burp!* The sour gas unclenched my sealed mouth and gained its freedom.

“Argh, what is that? Help, help!” The man withdrew his hands to cover his nose.

*Bam.* I fell to the floor, and so did he. He curled up beside the handle, his face distorted with pain and disgust. All these reminded me of the stinky tofu I had bought before I got on the train. I took out the greasy brown bag with the leftover tofu in it and untied the knot. I felt like an ancient Chinese soldier being armed with the finest spear. With the long sharp skewer, I pierced through the crispy nugget, and approached him.

Numerous cracks appeared on his crystal-like face. Dripping spicy sauce corroded his skin and left dime-sized holes, showing the hollow inside his body. *Who needs help now?*

“Get that away from me. . . Please, I’m begging you.”

I let go of the golden nugget above him and retreated to a single seat by the window.

“No!” The muscles, the bones the clothes shrank as small as the tofu and eventually diminished into dust.

“Please mind the platform gap when alighting,” the broadcast resumed.

As soon as the doors opened, I ran out of the train without looking back.



## Of Wild Dogs and the Sea

*Sarah Schulz*

It was early morning when I climbed over the fence. I had chosen to go when the American raiders appeared on the sky, dark dots against blue and green. The Japanese were too occupied to notice me slipping away, but my brother wasn't.

"Where are you going?" he asked me, gripping my wrist so tightly it hurt.

"To the beach," I answered, trying to yank free but with no success. My brother might be thinner than the rest of us since he kept giving his rations to the twins but he was still stronger.

"You can't!" he hissed. "If they catch you. . ."

He didn't need to go on. We had all experienced first-hand what the Japanese were capable of.

"I can die quickly or slowly, or not at all if they don't catch me."

"They will. They control all the beaches."

"Not the ones in the north-east. Mr. Cheung told me."

"No one goes there. It's too dangerous."

I finally managed to escape his grip. "Do you want to die then? Do you want to watch the twins waste away like Mei? Until they eat pebbles because they think they're fish balls?"

"It will break Mum's heart if we lose you."

"You won't," I said with more confidence than I felt. I left quickly before he could say anything else to change my mind.

It was true. Even before the war no one went to the beaches on the north-east coast. The mountains made it hard to get there, and there were stories about the forest: people not coming back. Some said it was wild animals, others said it was demons.

I doubted that any forest demon could be worse than the Japanese. Not after they took my father to use him for shooting practice at King's Park and made us watch.

But they could only kill me once. Watching my family starve to death slowly was worse than that. The north-east beaches had crabs and mussels, I've heard some fishermen talk about it but no one ever dared to actually go to the beach.

I encountered few problems on my way to the beach. The way was difficult, but I thought that was mostly because I had so little to eat that even my shifts at the hospital were exhausting.

My knees collapsed under my own weight when I finally had sand under my feet. My hands trembled when I searched for the

small portion of rice that I had taken with me. I didn't even chew it, just greedily swallowed it down. I was so exhausted I just wanted to go to sleep right there, but instead I buried my hands in the sand and waited for the tremors to stop.

Finally, I staggered down the beach to the shallow pools on the rocks' edge where the crabs and mussels would be. There were more than I had hoped.

The first thing I did was to cut them open and wolf them down. The whole Japanese army could have appeared on that beach, and I wouldn't have noticed or cared.

Afterwards I lay on the rocks, waiting for the pangs to go away. Only then did I get up. I opened the sack I had taken with me and began to fill it with mussels, even managing to catch two crabs in the shallow waters beneath the rocks.

I was about to pick up the third crab when I heard the growl. My first instinct was to try and hide the sack behind my back before turning around. As if that would have helped if the Japanese found me.

It wasn't the Japanese.

It was a pack of dogs, mangy, wild creatures that were prowling the beach. I instinctively stepped back into the water, away from them. Two of them followed me into the water, fangs bared, ears laid back. I clamped down the panic inside and waded into deeper water. I could swim, but then so could dogs if they had to.

Thankfully they didn't follow me beyond the shoreline, but I was trapped. Chest-high in the water, I had difficulty standing. But I couldn't go back to the beach. The pack prowled all over it, from one end of the cove to the other. And behind me was nothing but the open sea.

I waited. Maybe the dogs would return to the forest if the sun was high enough or at least they might go to sleep, but they didn't. The sun beat down on me mercilessly. My face began to burn, and I was dizzy and thirsty.

I didn't know how long I waited, but eventually it became clear that the dogs wouldn't leave the beach anytime soon and I was running out of time. I couldn't stay there. My best chance was to swim out and try to reach the next cove.

The wind had freshened up and splashed salt water into my face while the current was moving against me, pulling me back to the shore. The sack around my waist and my water-logged clothes were heavy, making it hard to lift my arms and move my legs.

Everything tasted of salt. My hair was crusted with it, my mouth filled with it and my eyes stung with it. I could barely keep them open.

I had lost sight of the rocky cove, and squinting against the sun and the water being blown in my eyes I could barely see anything.

Had I swum out enough? Where should I turn? Left? Right? Was the current pulling me in or out? I didn't know anymore.

In my panic I swallowed a mouthful of salt water. I splashed helplessly with my arms, trying to stay afloat while coughing.

I was going to be sick. My head felt so warm and heavy, and the sack was pulling me down. My arms felt as if someone had tied rocks to them. I couldn't lift them anymore, couldn't protect myself against the waves that were going to drown me and crash my body against the rocks.

Something grabbed me, and I screamed, hitting aimlessly in a bout of panic. A wet, rough, fleshy thing was clamped over my mouth.

"Keep it down, girl." The Cantonese voice came as if through a thick haze. Someone pulled me up, and suddenly I wasn't in the water anymore and the thing over my mouth was gone.

I wiped my eyes and saw a man scowling at me.

"What were you doing out there all alone?"

"Food," I answered breathlessly.

He shook his head, "Stupid girl."

Another panic seized me, and I felt for the sack. It was still there, still tied around my waist and filled.

"For that bit you risked your life?" He shook his head again. "Where do you live?"

"Sai Kung."

"I'll drop you off at the coast after dark. Think you can make it from there?"

I nodded. "Thank you."

He grunted instead of answering.

When the sun dropped under the horizon, he left me by the shore and watched till I climbed over the barbed wire fence, carrying the sack of crabs and mussels home.



## Mist

*Sarah Schulz*

The blinking clock tells her the time is 00:00.

Her watch says 03:01.

Kate groans and rolls to the side, throwing an arm over Daniel's chest. He's out cold, usually is.

There must have been a power outage.

She reaches for the clock and hisses as a spark of electricity snaps at her hand. The clock is sitting in a puddle of cold water, and it gives a little flicker, a whimper, before the display fades entirely.

Weird, Kate thinks. It must have been a leak, or maybe Daniel knocked over a glass of water. What had she been dreaming about? When had it gotten so cold in the room?

She looks down and expects the carpet to be wet, but a sweep of her bare foot tells her no, bone dry. Kate stands, wrapping her bed sheet around her body, and walks over to the window. Daniel's apartment is on the sixteenth floor. There's fog outside. She can't even see the opposite building.

Something's on the glass.

It's wet, and as Kate gingerly trails a finger through the smudge, it's cold to the touch. Like someone slid an ice cube across the glass.

Outside, the fog shifts. Kate returns to bed. Daniel reaches out to her in his sleep, pulling her against his chest.

What had she been dreaming about?

"You've never been late to work before. Ever."

Kate isn't listening. It's been a long morning, she's tired, and all she can think is how the hell can Nick look so intimidating when he's a head shorter than she?

"Sorry," she replies, absently. "Didn't get much sleep last night."

Nick arches an eyebrow. Kate doesn't notice; she's looking at the edge of the desk. There's something wrong with the grain of the wood. It's too shiny, like a cheap laminate.

But this is Nick Gant. He's classy. Not the type for cheap furniture.

"Did you hear me, Barton?"

Kate lifts her head, frowning. Had Nick been talking to her? She shakes her head.

"I said, maybe you ought to take some time off. You shouldn't have come back so soon after the funeral."

“Yeah.”

Noncommittal is the best Kate can do right now. Why was she late this morning? Had she missed the train? Had Daniel forgotten it was his turn to make breakfast again?

No. She remembers now. The clock, the puddle of water on the nightstand. She had overslept.

Embarrassing. She’s always on time and it’s such a rare event that Nick had seen fit to ask her about it in private. It rubs Kate the wrong way.

Nick suggests she sees one of the staff therapists, and then signs a slip of paper to make sure Kate does exactly that. He slides the paper across the glass top of the metal desk.

Kate stops in the doorway as she leaves, looking back.

Wasn’t the desk made of wood?

The new clock is blinking 00:00. It smells like smoke in the room.

Kate stares at the ceiling, unsure if she should even move. Her watch ticks past 03:01.

She’s sleeping alone tonight. Daniel has gone on some business trip last afternoon. To Bulgaria.

Bring me back some of those famous chocolates, Kate told him.

Daniel rolled his eyes. You’re thinking of Belgium, idiot.

Kate kissed him on the cheek. I know.

But she is alone, now.

Isn’t she?

The dream had been so vivid. More than any dream she’d ever had. There were. . . hands. Across her skin. Covering her mouth, pressing her hips into the bed. Long fingers tangled in her hair.

Outside, the fog shifts. Hair-thin cracks are spreading across the window, the glass stained by something cold and wet.

Kate doesn’t notice.

She’s lifted up the sheets, having finally moved and noticed something. . . not right.

There are scratches.

Kate feels her breath catch in her throat. There are scratches on her thighs. Long thin lines of red and pink. Little flecks of white raised skin.

Did she do that? Did she scratch herself while she was dreaming?

Kate doesn't go back to sleep, and she doesn't leave the bed. In the morning, she scrubs her hips and legs until they're raw.

Two days later, the staff therapist suggests to Nick that Kate should be given some free time.

Recommended leave. Her favourite words.

So she spends her time training, but it only makes things worse. It used to be calming. Nock the arrow. Draw. Feel her pulse. Aim. Wait for the moment between two heartbeats. Shoot.

Now she can't focus, can't keep her hands steady.

She hits herself with the bowstring again and again until the skin breaks.

She wants her life back.

Daniel calls her from Bulgaria, and makes a joke about chocolates. Kate doesn't laugh. She can tell Daniel is worried, but convinces him not to return early.

It's just a patch of insomnia, she says. It's work, I had it before. She uses every excuse she can think of including something hollow and unconvincing about her co-worker Tony getting on her nerves again, and that must be it. She knows Daniel isn't buying it.

She's right. After a call to his boss, Daniel is on the next flight back. He'll be home tomorrow.

It's not soon enough.

Kate is watching the clock.

It's ticking closer and closer to three in the morning. Closer. . . closer. . .

03:01.

Nothing. No short out. No puddle of water. No smoke.

Kate feels a surge of anger. It swells in her chest so much she needs to let it out on something. She picks up the second alarm clock she's bought that week and throws it against a wall. It shatters.

She hasn't slept for 24 hours now. It's nothing she hasn't done before; she used to be a student after all. That used to be normal.

This is not normal.

She started shaking an hour ago. An uncontrollable tremor in her left hand. She wants Daniel back, but his plane doesn't land for another three hours.

Outside, the fog is gathering.

There's something on the window behind her head, out of her field of vision. Something wet and cold. Cracks spread out over the surface of the glass, and the dampness spreads to the carpet. It moves

across the room, towards the bed, stopping beneath Kate's feet. Her feet dangle just a few inches above the carpet, and she shudders with a sudden chill. As she stands, the wetness retreats, pulling back beneath the bed like a snake in waiting.

A moment of clarity. Rationality kicks in.

There's no point in sitting on the edge of the bed, destroying alarm clocks. She needs some distraction.

The television. That usually works.

She makes her way into the living room and throws herself down on the couch, feet on the coffee table. But just because Daniel's not there to threaten shooting her toes off.

The carpet below the table is soaked through and ice cold.

Kate retrieves the remote and turns on the television, clicking around, looking for something interesting.

Every channel is showing the same thing. Her.

Kate stands, and the carpet is dry. Her eyes are wide and both of her hands are shaking now. She drops the remote and stares at the mirror image of herself.

She moves to the left. The image moves. She raises a hand. Same thing. She wants to scream, and the image wears a pained, distraught expression.

It has to be a trick. A mirror.

Kate grips the top of the television with both hands, pulling it from the wall and letting it shatter and spark on the floor. There's nothing behind it. No mirror. No cables that shouldn't be there. No camera.

She stumbles back and hits the floor, putting a hand out to brace herself.

The carpet is soaked. It feels as cold as ice.

Kate runs. The door slams behind her, and she doesn't even think to lock it.

The shattered, broken clock in the bedroom starts to blink.

00:00.

A figure rises out of the water in the carpet.

03:01 comes, and 03:01 goes. Kate is asleep.

She has been sleeping for two hours now. Daniel tried to get her to talk, got angry at her, told her how worried he was. None of it worked. They eventually turned in past midnight, frustrated and uneasy.

Kate fell asleep in Daniel's arms.

But Daniel's not there anymore.



She's cold. The change of temperature in the bed wakes Kate and she rolls over, switching on the light.

She cries out.

Daniel's eyes are empty. Wisps of green light lift like smoke from his body. No shadows are cast.

"Who are you?" she whispers.

"Who are you," not-Daniel replies.

A shudder runs through Kate's body, and she notices that the alarm clock is flashing behind Daniel's head.

00:00

"You broke the television," the voice continues, using Daniel's throat and mouth to make itself heard.

"Why are you doing this?" Kate asks. Whatever is inside of Daniel smiles, and it feels like hours before anything else is said.

"Look at yourself. You're a mess."

Kate glances down. There's nothing wrong. When she looks up again it feels like her eyes are only just opening. The clock reads 04:15. Daniel is asleep on his back.

Looks down.

Looks down? A mess?

Kate lifts the sheets and lets out a gasp

There are scratches on her bare thighs. Long, dark scratches pricked with spots of red blood.

She spends the rest of the night in the bathroom. Daniel bangs on the door, threatens to kick it down, begs her to explain what's going on. Kate's throat is too raw from vomiting to answer.

Even if she could, she wouldn't know what to say.

No one looks Kate in the eye.

She's benched.

Her boyfriend thinks she's completely lost it.

Daniel wouldn't even let her leave the apartment. But he has to go to work eventually and she's wandering the streets like a wraith.

She's afraid to go home.

She does it anyway before Daniel comes home.

Tears roll down her cheeks.

"Why are you doing this?" Kate looks into the mirror, her hands pressed on either side of the glass. She knows how awful she looks. Her face is pale and drawn, there are deep lines and dark circles around her eyes. She hasn't slept properly in days, can't remember the last time she ate. Tony who is in her archery team told her she looked like she was wasting away.

She wishes it was that simple.

“Please,” she whispers, her fingers shaking against the porcelain. “Please, please. . .”

She’s so tired.

She can’t do this anymore. Daniel’s razor glints in the neon light. After all the time she nagged at him for using a straight razor instead of a safety one, it feels ironic.

She lifts it.

Something cracks. The temperature of the room drops.

Kate opens her eyes, and there is something wet spreading across the surface of the mirror. Something cold. The glass is cracking.

A fog is gathering.

“Don’t do that.”

Kate is too tired to jump. Too tired to pull away when she feels soft, long-fingered hands rest lightly on her shoulders. She leans into Daniel’s chest.

“You should have gotten rid of it,” he tells her, taking the razor from her hand.

“I’m so tired,” Tears roll down her cheeks.

Daniel leads her back into the bedroom. “It was this foggy two months ago,” he says, looking out of the window. “And it was so cold. I thought I’d never be warm again. You were already asleep when I came home. So I ran a bath and slit my wrists with the razor.”

She whimpers.

“When did you wake up?”

“Midnight.”

“Of course,” his head oscillates back and forth like a snake. When he reaches for her, Daniel’s eyes are startling green. When he was alive they were brown.

Kate scrambles backwards, running for the phone in the hallway. With trembling hands she presses the buttons for the first number that comes to her mind.

“Tony?” she’s crying. “I need help.”

A year later Tony tosses a bag down on the counter, leaning over the back of the couch to kiss Kate.

Kate doesn’t tear her eyes away from the television screen. She’s playing Halo online with her new lab partner and she’d rather die than let that spoiled bastard beat her again.

“New arrows,” Tony announces, flicking the top of Kate’s ear.

She still doesn’t turn around.

“I don’t know what you did to break the old ones, but don’t do it again, okay?”

Kate grunts something noncommittal, swearing and tossing the controller across the floor as her screen goes red. Bastard. “You on the clock?” she asks, twisting on the couch and grinning up at Tony, who shakes his head. “Sweet. We should get dinner.”

“We need to leave soon then,” Tony replies. “It’s starting to get weirdly foggy out there.”

Kate climbs over the back of the couch, walks across the lounge and stares out of the window. Green eyes stare back.



## Forget Sorrows

Michelle Tingco Leung

I

*Ding. . . Ding. . . Ding. . . Ding. . .*

I woke up to the loud chimes and random Chinese chanting in the hall. My surroundings were blurry, and I had no idea where I was. I supposed I had been asleep for a long time. *Stay calm, I will figure out where I am and be out of here in no time.*

“Where am I?” It seemed like a very serious occasion. I did not want to startle anyone. Perhaps my voice was too soft for no one answered. Even the woman sitting next to me did not seem to hear me. I decided to rely on my observations instead.

A man walked in. I could not see well enough but I could tell that he was wearing full black and was walking towards the middle of the room. A smooth large polished wooden box rested there on a stand.

“First bow. . .”

The man bowed.

“Second bow. . .”

The man bowed.

“Third bow. . .”

The man bowed.

“To the family. . .”

The man turned towards a group of people in white robes and bowed. They bowed back.

My face turned pale, and the air became so chilly it gave me goose bumps. Although my view was still blurred, I now knew where I was.

*WHAT on Earth am I doing at a funeral? WHO on Earth is this funeral for? HOW on Earth am I supposed to get out of here?*

“Ding. . . Families and friends, please rise and walk around the coffin once for a last glance at the deceased,” the host of the ceremony bellowed after a crisp ring of the chimes.

The guests rose and formed a line around the coffin. I had no time to think, so I stumbled to my feet and followed them. Everyone took baby steps around the coffin, bidding the deceased a final farewell.

“Oh, son! How could you leave me here? How could you let the white-haired send the black haired?” the woman in a white robe cried, her voice so desperate it dug deep into my heart.

*Wait a minute! That voice, I have heard it before.* It sounded so strange, yet so familiar. I looked at the woman who was crying into the coffin in the front of the line. Although I was at the end of the line, we were in a circle around the coffin and I could see everyone.

I stood still in shock. I was confused. This was no random funeral. I stared at the woman in white, then at a few others who were also dressed in white robes. Finally, I looked around at everyone else wearing black suits.

“Mother, it is me. Mother, can you hear me?” I walked over to talk to my mother. She did not hear me.

“Father! I am Jay! Do you hear me? Please, father! Tell me! Why are you wearing the white robes? Only family members of the deceased wear those. Tell me, father, who died? Please tell me it is not my beloved sister, for I would cry my heart out if so!”

Father did not speak. He did not even turn to face me. He continued to sob silently.

I began to panic. It was impossible! Somebody should have noticed me by now.

“June! My dear sister! Thank goodness, you are alright! Now, be a good girl and tell you brother what is happening here.” I loved my sister, and she loved me too. She would never ignore me unless I had done something really bad. Was it something I had done?

I felt sweat dripping off my forehead. I began talking to everyone in line, hoping someone would answer me.

“Wong, do you hear me? Bill, please answer me.” They were friends, and I asked every single person. There was no reply.

I came to the end of the line. “Ben! My best friend! You would never turn me down. Please tell me where I am.”

Ben twitched his head a little. I almost thought he saw me. He gave a brief glance and turned back before I could call his name once more. A tear drop appeared at the corner of his eye.

“Why? Oh Ben, why, buddy? Out of everybody, you who would never turn your back on me act as if you do not know me anymore?”

I was tired and I gave up trying. I came to the last person in line. He was the man I had seen walking into the hall. I knew he saw me immediately, for he stared straight into my eyes almost as if he had been waiting for me.

“Ding. . .” The chimes rang again, crisper than ever.

The host spoke. “When the clock strikes noon, all spirits must leave. Guests, please look down as the coffin is closed once and for all.”

Everyone looked down. Everyone except the man and me. The clock continued to tick.

11:55. . . 11:56. Our eyes met.

11:57. . . 11:58. The man began to change. His shoulders broadened and his shirt began to tear. His face twisted and horns grew out of the top of his head. He became a bull-headed, horse-faced animal, the kind of creature that pulled spirits down to the Yellow Stream where they would be sent to the next life.

I looked at him helplessly. My body would not let me think, speak or move. The creature pointed his axe at me, locked my wrists with chains and dragged me towards the wooden box.

11:59. . . He pulled my hair and forced me to look into the coffin. I refused, but he overpowered me. The moment I saw what was in it, my face turned bloodless like the face in the coffin. It was me.

12:00. *SLAM!* The lid of the coffin banged shut. Before anyone could lift up his head, the entire world disappeared in a white flash.



## II

“Here comes another one, I see. Only twenty, young as can be,” a lady said softly and gently. She had gray hair neatly tied in a bun. She had wrinkles on her face, but no one would call her old although anyone who saw her would lose track of time. In her hand was a bowl of soup.

She stood by the Yellow Stream where all souls must pass through before they proceeded to where they should go. A wooden boat rocked gently in the stream.

“Meng Po, my mistress. I have brought you the gentleman you have asked for. I took him from his loved ones, regardless of their cries and pleas,” said the creature with the head of a bull and the face of a horse.

Behind him walked a soul-less young man. His body was chained although he seemed to have no intention to escape. His eyes were hollow as if he had never lived.

Meng Po smiled the gentlest smile. “My most loyal guard, I am sorry to have you do all the filthy work. It must not be easy. But do remember. Every living thing has its time. It is our duty to keep track of their time and maintain the balance of nature. Now son, come over here and it will all be over soon.”

The young man walked towards her like a robot following her command.

She held out a bowl of soup. It was dark, tasting like all the tastes in the world. “Drink this, and you will forget all the sorrows you have faced in your life. Then you will be new and go on to where you should go.”

The young man took the bowl and did what he was told. He did this so mindlessly that anyone who saw the scene would be sad.

As he drank, a teardrop fell from his eye, rolled down his cheek and dropped into the bowl. He drank the teardrop along with the soup. Once he had finished, he dragged himself to the wooden boat and lay himself inside purposefully.

Meng Po untied the rope, and the boat floated on to wherever the current might take it.

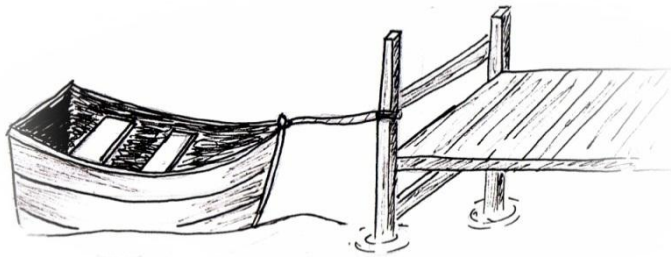
The guard sighed and said, “There goes another one. It’s a shame, all that has happened in one’s life gone in one gulp.”

Meng Po giggled. “This soup is for the spirits to forget sorrow. Most of the time humans live such miserable lives. All they remember when their souls leave their bodies are the sad times. They’ve been so sad they forget about what it is like to be happy. So when they drink this soup, they forget their miseries. They have not spared space for love and happiness, so they do not deserve to

remember. That boy, however, is of a good nature. He loved his family and friends, which was why it took you so long to bring him here.”

The guard looked thoughtful. “True. In other times, the deceased would not have the chance to see their friends and families in the end.”

Meng Po turned to wash the bowl in the stream. “His tear which dropped into his bowl and which he drank will preserve the love and happiness he cherished so much in his life and will bless him wherever he may go until eternity.”





## Contributors' notes

### *Angela Cheung Wing Yu*

Angela Cheung Wing Yu is in her final year of BA English for Professional Communication. She loves words and believes in their power. She is happy that her writing can appear in a book so she can share her stories with others. The journal also marks a full stop for her colourful years in university and a beginning of her imaginative life.

### *Connie Wong*

Last year, I was still an accounting student, but accounting in the end was not my cup of tea. I thus transferred into the Department of English. It was the correct decision! I have loads of fun writing creative stories and learning interesting literature. In the future, I hope I can pursue a profession that is related to English, maybe teaching kindergarten children.

### *Jeffrey Chan Cheng Ho*

Jeffrey Chan Cheng Ho is a third year Creative Media major student. He loves creating images through words or drawings. He enjoys realizing his ideas in games, animations, videos and writings, so as to share his imaginary world with others.

### *Jess Wong Chui Lam*

A ten-year-old soul trapped in a 21 year-old body. Writes to make imagination come alive. Like Hong Kong, she is a kaleidoscope; many changes, many new traits to be discovered.

### *Lily Yang Anqi*

Born in mainland China, Lily came to Hong Kong four years ago as a new City U student. She felt very lucky that there were so many chances for her to learn what she was interested in-- culture, architecture, multimedia design, and of course, literature!

*Michelle Tingco Leung*

Stories themselves are magic. They take us to places we never dream of going to. My pen is a car and the most I can do is to drive you there. The rest you'll have to deal with in your imagination. Have fun and enjoy the ride.

*Sarah Schulz*

Grew up between books and fairytales in Berlin and left Berlin to find more stories in the rivers of southern France, the lochs of eastern Scotland and the streets of Hong Kong. Loves stories in all shapes and forms since she's set out to explore all the worlds, not just this one.

*Shirley Geok-lin Lim (Visiting Professor, English Department, City University of Hong Kong)*

Fulbright and Wien International Scholar; Ph.D. Brandeis University; her first book of poems, *Crossing the Peninsula*, received the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Also published six other volumes of poetry; three books of short stories; two novels; a children's novel, *Princess Shawl* (translated into Chinese, published in Taiwan, 2009); and recently a selected short stories and poetry volume, *The Shirley Lim Collection*. Her memoir, *Among the White Moon Faces*, received the American Book Award. She is currently Professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Lim was awarded the Multiethnic Literatures of the United States (MELUS) 2009 Lifetime Achievement Award and the UCSB Faculty Research Lecture Award.

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