

Content

Kingsley Bolton	Forward	5
Justin Hill	Preface	9
	Editors' Introduction	10
	Prose	
Charlene Chan	<i>The Chinese Banyan</i>	12
	Poetry	
Lee An Yee, Sarah	<i>42</i>	19
Michelle Ho	<i>A Nepalese Haven in Jordan</i>	20
	Prose	
Phoebe Cheung Yun Chui	<i>Jackie</i>	21
	Poetry	
Ng Ka Yue, Jacky	<i>The Dream of a Stone</i>	28
	Prose	
Daphne Leung	<i>Heroin Heroine</i>	30

	Poetry	
Lee An Yee, Sarah	<i>Detached</i>	40
Lui Ka Suen Veronica	<i>Night Float</i>	41
	Prose	
Belinda Ip	<i>Leah, Ellen, Danielle, Karine</i>	43
	Poetry	
Jiang Peng, Jolie	<i>Suffer Little Children Come Unto Me</i>	52
Janice Lo	<i>Worlds Apart</i>	54
	<i>Ignorance is Bliss</i>	56
	Prose	
Wong Hiu Tung, Flora	<i>Skyfall</i>	57
	Script	
Chan Ho Long Jamez, Fung Chun Ming Colman, Ip Nga Yi Katherine, Janice Lo and Yeun Wing Yin Wings	<i>When Strangers Meet</i>	62
	Poetry	
Daphne Leung	<i>What's the Maths for This?</i>	74

Prose

Joyce Ma *Greenhouse* 76

Poetry

Queenie Li *The Summerless End* 83

Tiananmen Square 85

Prose

Charlene Chan *The Couple* 86

Jess Wong Chui Lam *Dream to me* 94

Phoebe Cheung Yun Chui *Fish Tank* 102

Mehul Kumar *Hell* 110

Poetry

Yip Hong Ting, Jenny *The Way to Live your Life* 118

Ho Chin Ching Valerian *How to Cook a Porterhouse* 119

Prose

Chan Ho Long Jamez *A Lemming* 121

Fung Mei Yan Miranda *July 27th* 129

Poetry

Leung Ying Yu, Zoe *The Waiting* 136

Lui Ka Suen Veronica *In Love We Drown* 138

Wong Chui Wing, Kristen *Youthful Warriors* 140

Prose

Jess Wong Chui Lam	<i>Shattered Symphony</i>	142
Ankit Girdhar	<i>The Lady in Red</i>	148

Poetry

Gao Guoshuang, Crystal	<i>Urban Magnet</i>	157
------------------------	---------------------	-----

Prose

Queenie Li	<i>The Kids in Kwai Chung Estate</i>	159
Janice Lo	<i>The Crash</i>	169
Weifan Chang	<i>Sentiment</i>	175

Poetry

Daphne Leung	<i>Words will always have me, and I them</i>	189
--------------	--	-----

Foreword

This collection of creative writing has been written and edited by undergraduate students in the Department of English at City University of Hong Kong. It includes short stories, poems, and a short drama that reflect the lives and dreams of young people in Hong Kong society today, a unique territory, whose contemporary realities reflect its own very special history. Much could be said about Hong Kong as a place and as an experience, but one major dynamic of the Hong Kong throughout recent decades has been its constant change, and the astonishing speed and pace of change – economic, social, and political – that the society has experienced in recent decades.

For much of its colonial existence Hong Kong existed as a strategic seaport and backwater naval base, half forgotten by its British rulers in London, until the latter decades of the twentieth century, when it emerged as a trading and financial centre that served as a broker for international trade and finance into and out of the People's Republic of China. With the emergence and development of modern China from the late seventies onwards, the city came to terms with a new destiny, which saw it opening up to a new China, whose economic wealth was beginning to challenge that of its Asian neighbours, and, in time, that of its western rivals. Now, some sixteen years after the 1997 handover,

Hong Kong is again renegotiating its identity, one that is again partly inside and partly outside of its adjacent motherland – and its now porous border – whose tourists throng the city streets, and where the luxury shops handle customers in fluent *putonghua*, instead of home-grown Cantonese.

Most students now attending Hong Kong universities would have been in kindergarten or primary school in 1997, and discussions of colonialism and its afterlife may mean very little to them. Nevertheless, the legacy of the colonial era in the form of public housing projects, subsidised education, and public hospitals persists, and contributes – together with a local Cantonese media industry – to a sense of identity rather distinct from that of its mainland neighbours. Part of that legacy has also involved a premium on space, and today most university students come from housing estate backgrounds in urban areas where the density of population is among the highest in the world, and where a five-hundred square foot apartment is typically home to a family of four or more. From such backgrounds, students graduate from crowded homes to crowded schools, and, with application and luck, to crowded universities. Once at university, students are urged by parents to choose ‘practical’ subjects of study, in order to gain secure or well-paid jobs, such as medicine or law – if they have the chance – or business, computer science, and engineering. Given this, the space for creativity generally, and the space for creative writing specifically, has been limited at local universities up

to now, although this has recently begun to change, as the creative industries - including advertising, arts management, media, publishing and related professions - are now recognized as playing an important role in the local economy. More broadly, employers in the community are also demanding that local university graduates should be encouraged to think critically and creatively. Partly in response to this, the Department of English at City University has started a number of initiatives on creativity in the last few years, including stream of its B.A. in English Studies specifically in 'English for the Creative Professions'.

The students contributing to this volume of creative writing included students at all levels, from all disciplinary backgrounds, and a number of different ethnicities. The collection is drawn from one semester's course work only, where students worked together with a team of teachers from the English Department. Their work includes short stories, poetry, and even a short play, and reflect a range of themes, both local and exotic. The local is highlighted in a number of the stories that visit the housing estates, noodle shops, and wet markets of Kwai Chung, Ngau Tau Kok, and Wanchai, and where, more than once, there is a visible nostalgia for places already changed, already disappeared. A number of the stories also deal with such topics as friendship, parental pressure, relationships, and youthful anxiety, while others explore imaginative fiction, including ghosts, spirits, and stories of India and the Philippines. The poems presented

here draw on diverse inspirations from street life to universal themes of self and connection, and to the traumas of illness and death.

Cumulatively, this is a remarkable collection of writing, with some truly fine pieces showcasing the best pieces from a single semester's work. The students contributing to this collection, and their teachers, are to be congratulated and thanked for sharing their words, their voices, and their creativity with us, their readers.

Kingsley Bolton
Chair Professor of English
City University of Hong Kong

January, 2013

Preface

I have long felt that there were many stories coming out of the undergraduate creative writing programme that deserved more of a life than a brief existence as an academic assignment that once marked and graded had fulfilled its purpose in life, and was subsequently discarded.

Professor Shirley Lim brought out *Halfway Home*, a collection of Children's Stories in 2012, and this collection builds on that excellent start: expanding the range of stories to all the work done across the many undergraduate classes.

I would like to thank Professor Shirley Lim for her example, support and enthusiasm. Professor Kingsley Bolton and Professor Rodney Jones for their help and support and doing so much to help embed creative writing into the English Department of City University.

I would also like to thank the students, for telling their tales, and the editors who gave their time and insights into bringing this collection to print.

Justin Hill
Assistant Professor
City University of Hong Kong
February 2013

Editors' Introduction

Hong Kong smother's creativity, so people say. This collection proves the opposite: it is a bungee jump of stories. Forget about your busy schedule and the overcrowded city and come with us on a journey of adventure and fantasy!

This collection of stories, poems and drama varies wildly in terms of writing styles and themes, there is one thing in common – honesty. Each writer brings back a particular moment or feeling: the day a beloved family members departed or when high school romance bloomed, or when friendship faded.

When *Halfway Home* was produced last year, it demonstrated the vivid imagination of writers at City University. Under the same title, this year's creative writing journal has expanded from children's fiction to include prose, poetry and drama. It is a collaborative work of students in different forms of creative writing with no restriction in themes or genres. The writers experiment; they turn images and voices on their mind into precise and accurate words; they unleash their untamed vision; they reveal their deepest secrets.

In this journal, readers will be able to experience different sorts of 'home'. The ideal home which contains joy and happiness; the fragmented home where despair and scars are left. We are thankful to witness the home of numerous characters, created by

the writers. They demonstrate the complexity of a human soul. They may be imaginary, but they are never completely divorced from reality.

Between the lines, readers will see the yearning for life. In building the characters and developing the plots, the writers write to enlighten. Although characters experience disappointment, betrayal, separation, they never give up hope. In times of despair, writers use their wit and humour to help readers embrace the unpredictable twists in life. It is by the change of the characters, readers are inspired.

On behalf of the editorial team of *Halfway Home II*, we would like to express our gratitude to all the talented student writers for sharing their amazing work. We enjoyed reading every entry: successful or not.

We would also like to thank Mr Justin Hill for teaching the creative writing seminars and for leading the editorial team in publishing *Halfway Home II*.

Editors:

Jess Wong, Phoebe Cheung

Assistant Editors:

Janice Lo, Joyce Ma, Charlene Chan, Queenie Li

Faculty Advisor:

Justin Hill

The Chinese Banyan

Charlene Chan

Since the government announced the Ngau Tau Kok Upper Estate demolition plan, we had been throwing things away every day. My grandparents wanted to keep many things but my mother and aunts didn't want to move old furniture to the new house.

I still remember the afternoon when my younger cousin and I rested in the shades of the huge Chinese Banyan to look after the mattresses and chairs, while my aunts and uncles were slowing carrying overstuffed carton boxes up the hill like ants moving food.

My cousin Marilyn was only five. She was slightly taller than other girls at the same age, probably because she had inherited the good genes from her tall parents. Her mother loved putting her in the stereotypical girly pink, but she hated the colour. She was still too young to doubt her parents' choices, so she reluctantly put on her mother's favourite baby pink pants and the pair of white Nike sneakers with a huge magenta tick.

We were not the only family occupying the shade. The other families also sent their small kids to look after the valuables they put at the Chinese Banyan, while the elderly parents stayed in the old house to watch the expensive appliances like the fridge and gas stoves. My grandparents also stationed at home even though

there were not many things left – the television, gas stoves, water boiler, microwave oven and even the short wooden stool that my grandpa made from scratch, had all gone to the garbage station.

Surrounded by stacks of rectangular stools with rusted metal legs, piles of semi-transparent plastic boxes with broken wheels, and rolls of bamboo mats with brittle nylon threads, Marilyn and I sat on the walnut cabinet, which had been keeping our family photo albums organised for twenty years. It witnessed our parents growing up, getting married, leaving home.

‘It’s probably the most expensive furniture we have,’ I said to Marilyn, repeating what grandma told me one day, when she told me the stories behind every piece of furniture in the house.

The cabinet belonged to my grandaunt, and was given to us when she moved to Toronto with her son and grandchildren thirty years ago. She didn’t want to discard it because it was a very precious wedding gift from her parents, who had passed away already.

It was luxurious to have wooden furnishing at home in the eighties, especially for a family of eight living in a public housing estate. The cabinet replaced the yellowed plastic drawer boxes that had tiny cracks on, because it was too weak to withstand the weight of the second-hand colour television.

‘Then why are we throwing it away?’ Marilyn asked. Unlike me, she was witty, sunshiny and assertive – we very much reflected our mothers’ contrasting personalities.

‘Mom said it’s too old to keep,’ I said, as I was asking my mother the same question an hour ago, ‘and there are small holes at the back.’

The small round and oval holes were very likely insect bites. It is common that old wood furniture become homes to beetles and termites, especially when the weather is so humid in spring and summer – we couldn’t afford dehumidifier or air conditioners.

There were many marks and scratches on the surface too. Some were made when it was moved from my grandaunt’s place, which was two blocks away. My grandma said it was a big day and everyone in the family helped. It took them nearly an hour to move it down the stairs from the 8th floor on Block 6, and another two to climb up 11 floors at Block 4. They were frustrated to see a few deep scratches and a dented corner, but were soon excited about the new wooden cabinet.

Some other scratches were made by scissors, blades and ballpoint pen tips. There were some strokes scraped off abruptly, which I guess were drawn by my youngest uncle, who was the naughtiest among his siblings.

The longest scratch was covered with a laminated black and white photograph taped onto the left door, but it was taken down already. It was the first photo the family took, to celebrate the birth of the only son. My grandpa’s colleague at the Kowloon Bus knew a friend who works at a studio in the neighbourhood, and he was given a discount.

I could hardly recognise anybody in that picture, not even my mother. Every face was so young, fresh and innocent. My mother, the eldest daughter, was twelve while my only uncle, the youngest son, was just born. The sisters put on gymslips with short princess sleeves underneath, and tidied their long hair in braids, and decorated them with small bows. The infant was wrapped in a large swaddle with four Chinese characters embroidered, which wishes good health for the baby.

‘But we put mothballs,’ she said.

‘Those are for the clothes,’ I replied uncertainly after a while. All I know about the mothballs was that the smell was very strong, and grandma put it with the clothes that they seldom wear.

It was a hot Saturday afternoon in August without a cloud in the sky. The new blocks were ten minutes’ walk up the hill, along a very steep slope without trees. My dad and uncles’ t-shirts were already soaked in sweat at the collar and the armpits, but there were still a lot to move. I handed them a palm-shaped hand fan and a few bottles of water but the ice was melted in the sun.

‘It’s hot as hell up there!’ my dad said, as he dried the sweat on his neck with a thin hand towel.

‘I don’t think they’ll plant any trees for us,’ my uncle said softly, as if it was a secret not to be heard by people around, ‘the walkway is too narrow.’

We heard that the Housing Department would plant some

trees along the pavement, but my uncle was right – the trees never came. Instead, they hung rectangular flowerpots on the handrails, and put garden flowers that were replaced with new ones every three months. The soil was not enough to keep the flowers strong and healthy so they died after heavy rains, and then the dead ones were removed and empty pots were left along the road.

At the end of the day, the walnut cabinet was sent to the garbage station together with the metal bunk beds and the fridge. When Marilyn and I reached the new home, I was not as excited as the adults were, and so were my grandparents. My grandpa sat on a wooden stool and stared at the dark green leather two seats, and my grandma trying very hard to pull the freezer drawer out of the new fridge in the kitchen.

‘Grandpa, why not sit on the sofa?’ Marilyn asked. But my grandpa didn't say a word. He poked the armrest with his index finger, and then pressed deeply into the seat cushions with his palm. He paused for a second or two, and slightly shook his head.

While my uncles were busy setting up the computer, my mother was skimming through the instruction manual of the Plasma TV and murmuring herself. Maybe she thought she was explaining to my grandpa how to use the remote control, but he was looking out of the window and watching the children in the playground. They made me unpack the electric kettle, wall fan and the desk lamp, and I took out more and more manuals for my grandparents to study.

‘Sis, aren’t we getting a new table?’ asked my third aunt, pointing at the square folding table with moveable legs, which hurt Marilyn’s index finger when she was playing under it one day.

‘It will come next Wednesday,’ my second aunt said, delighted to see the new black chestnut wardrobe fitted perfectly into the space between the bunk bed and the desk.

The new table arrived a day early. It couldn’t be folded so it occupied half of the living room, and it was too heavy to move around so daily cleaning became difficult. The old table was gone by the next day, together with the stools that were not originally in the plan. The following weekend when I went back to grandma’s place for Mid-Autumn Dinner, the house looked completely different again.

Evacuation from the old Upper Estate was completed in early October. As the temperature went down, people stopped asking for trees and shades. Fascinated by the air-conditioned footbridge connecting the new Upper Estate and the wet market, no one dared to take the steep slope anymore.

One day, I walked by the Chinese Banyan. I missed the tiny space where people used to spend their afternoons, where elderly parents sit around talk to one another randomly and start a topic about kids and life, where the children hide and seek around the huge trunk, where different people contribute incense sticks, candles, oranges and even a radio to the estate altar at the wide roots.

Later, it was secretly removed together with the old estate, and the whole area was turned into a car park. Fewer people walk there. The Chinese Banyan remains as childhood memories to be forgotten in the passage of time, and probably as the story of the good old days to be mentioned until the aged pass away.

42

Across the pedestrian crossing,
you caught me
flinging his arm away,
in front of the Sogo glassy door.

At the ends of the forty-two yellow lines,
I heard your sharpest scream,
like a Formula One with a failing brake.
You saw my reddest cheeks,
like the red red roses we planted in our garden.

I tried to elude from the blunder.
The wall of pedestrians pushed me further.
The bloodless greenman blinked as a reminder.

Forty-two, we knew the number
because we counted it together,
starting from where I should be standing.

Michelle Ho

A Nepalese Haven in Jordan

Ladies in heels
Men can't refuse
I dress in black,
mourning.

We eat dinner at sunrise
not French fries or nuggets.
Manakamana,
food with dignity.
The taste of Jordan.
The taste of home.

Few glasses of Mustang beer,
laugh and go silent.
Dim light on the street
Homeless under the bridge,
shivering.

I bend, put a \$100 note
beside his paper board bed.

Jackie

Phoebe Cheung Yun Chui

It is the middle of August. 5:50pm. 32° Celsius – according to the weather report. People are trapped in the city by skyscrapers. The skyscrapers form a sturdy wall. No one can climb over it or knock it down. Nothing can enter or exit through this wall, not even a soul. The gigantic electric billboards on the wall further heat up the bastion. People dwell on the street like ants on a desert. No matter how fast they walk, they still cannot outrun the yellow cabs on the concrete road. At the end of the street, a clinic sits there quietly. White light from a fluorescent light penetrates the sanded glass wall of the clinic from inside. A blurry image of a man is shown through the glass. The man in a white top is sitting right behind the glass.

The clinic is cold as an icebox. 15 degree Celsius, probably. The man sitting on the couch wipes the sweat with a checked handkerchief. He has been biting his fingers on and off for twenty minutes already. First his index finger, then the ring finger, and finally the baby finger. First his left hand, then the right. He takes out a document from his briefcase and tries to read it. There are neither images nor pictures printed on it. Only lines of words run endlessly on the papers. Only black and white. Two pages. That is the best that he can do. He looks at his silver watch on his wrist

every two minutes. His well-ironed shirt and trousers become creased after sitting for too long. The golden nametag above the man's chest pocket is especially shiny under the white light. District Manager – Jose Valencia. That is his name.

No one in the clinic says a word. But the sound of the man swallowing his saliva is crystal clear.

There is a fifty three year-old nurse sitting inside the counter. A pair of glasses hangs above her nose. She wears a light pink nurse hat. It goes with her uniform. The hat is too small to hide her dark, thick and curly hair. She does not bother to comb it or whatever. The hair falls wherever it wants. This is already the third time she flips through today's newspaper. Her oxblood red manicure makes her look busy whenever she flips the pages. There is not a hint of emotion shown on her face.

After a while, a woman steps out from a room.

The tag on the door is written – 'Dr Fred Smith'. The woman wears a white loose dress, which hides her figure. Her red crystal nose ring is especially eye catching on her pale face. Her long and blonde hair falls naturally on her shoulder. The pair of 3-inches high heels that she wears helps form a rhythm as she walks towards the couch. Her pace is slow and the steps are heavy. A scent of jasmine's sweetness is left in the air. Nothing in the clinic can draw her attention, except the floor.

The nurse yawns without using her hands to cover her mouth. She stands up from the chair. And leaves the newspaper in

the desk. Then she goes into the pharmacy room behind the counter. She does not bother to give another glance to either the man or the woman. Yet, she does take a good look of her fingernails before she goes.

The man stands up briskly from the couch and stops biting his fingers. He looks at the woman and smiles faintly. The woman stops in front of the man. Her face is still facing the ground.

‘So what did the doctor say? Huh?’ The man said it beside the woman’s ear, with a soft voice, almost whispering to the woman.

The man puts his hand on the woman’s shoulder. He caresses her like a parent to his child.

‘The doctor said we are good to go now.’ She said it while she lifts up her head. But she does not smile like the man.

Now they are facing each other. Just that the woman avoids any eyes contact with the man, as if their eyes are playing dodge ball.

The man smiles. ‘I won’t leave this place until you tell me what I want to hear.’ The voice is full of expectation. Like a kid who wants a candy from his mother.

The woman nods slightly. ‘Just like what you have expected.’ She turns her back against him as she finishes the sentence.

The man wears a bigger smile now. ‘So...how many weeks? Four? Five? Or...or eight?’ He walks couple steps to

where the woman is facing. ‘How could I not notice that earlier?’

The man pretends to be knocking his head with his fist and continues, ‘How silly I am, huh?’

The woman’s hair covers almost half of her face. Still, the man can see the woman is weeping. She does not look into the man’s eyes. The game of dodge ball is not yet finished.

The man puts his hand under the woman’s chin, trying to lift up her head. The woman does not let him.

‘Hey, sweetheart, don’t cry,’ the man said. He smiled. His voice sounds so gentle, like a father muttering to his dearest baby. ‘Otherwise ‘Jackie’ would think that I’m a bad person.’

The man is rubbing the woman’s shoulder. This time the woman does not resist.

She goes speechless, covering her face with both hands. She cries out loud and cannot hold back her tears anymore. Her palms are wet. Her hair beside her face is wet. Probably tastes salty, too.

The man stretches out his arms. The woman is surrounded by his arms.

He pats the woman’s back and said ‘Alright, alright. Cry as long as you want. I’ll just treat it as a practice for *our* ‘Jackie’.’

Suddenly the woman stops sobbing. All she can feel is being wrapped by the sense of guilt. Every inch of her muscle and every hair attached to her body freeze inside the man’s arms.

‘Not *ours*,’ she says faintly, her hands still covering her face.

But it is loud enough for the man to hear.

The man's arms fall down from the woman's shoulders, swinging in the air. The woman is no longer in the man's arms. But the guilt does not go away. They are two separate entities now. It only takes one second for them to part.

There is no more weeping sound, but only the clock ticking.

The man starts the conversation again. 'What's that supposed to mean?' Calmly he said, 'Wait, wait, is this some sort of prank?'

He is no longer smiling.

The woman replies him with silence. She touches her own belly in circular motion, slowly and gently. She murmurs to herself. No one can hear what she says, not even the man.

He goes through the stuff and looks over the room. First the dusty shelf piled with expired magazines. Then gap behind the worn-out couch. Finally the framed certificates hanged on the wall since the first day of business. He then walks towards to the woman again.

'Where is the camera? Huh?' The man yelled to the woman, 'Tell me!' He squeezes the woman's arm.

The woman keeps shaking her head. Tears fall along her face. One of them lands on the floor.

'There is no camera,' she said with a shaky voice 'I'm sorry.'

‘Sorry,’ the man almost screams out the words, ‘is not a place!’

The woman is in tremendous shock. Because of the fury and disappointment in the man’s voice. She could not move as if a spell is cast on her.

‘Just say something, please.’ the woman said.

He opens his eyes so big and stares right into the woman’s eyes. He takes a deep breath. Swallows a big mouthful of saliva. And takes another short breath.

‘Of course it is *ours*.’

That is the best line he is capable of saying.

He turns to the sanded glass wall, which isolates him from the outside world. His eyes are fixated on the blurred billboard across the street behind the glass. It is an image of a woman wearing a neon blue bikini. The man cannot bear looking at the woman anymore, not even one second. Any woman would be good enough to replace her. As long as *that woman* vanishes from his sight. For good.

There is nothing that the woman can hold on to now, except the dress she is wearing. She squeezes her dress with all the strength in her fist, until her own nails hurts her flesh.

The lights inside the clinic are off as the clock on the wall strikes six. But the streetlights outside the clinic are on by then. Both of them are encroached by the darkness inside the clinic. Only meagre light is left on the man and woman’s faces.

The nurse comes out from the pharmacy room, and appears in the counter again. Her pink uniform turns black due to the lack of light. Abruptly she intrudes the conversation between the man and the woman.

‘Young people, the clinic is closing. Just go home,’ she said, like a routine line to say.

Ng Ka Yue, Jacky

The Dream of a Stone

Night is artistic.

All colours are absorbed, meter and mile are mixed.

Drowned in black syrup, everything blurred.

The world is reshaping.

Overwhelmed in silence,

only the glimmers suspending above,

can make our clogged mind transparent.

Like a writer's slightest, shimmering inspiration,

Tasting the solitude, envisioning in the soothing touch of breeze.

Our dreams are those shattered stars in the cloudless sky.

How many of them, eventually, will be enlightened,

by these tiny sparks in the dark?

And what if, a star falls?

Degraded to a stone, mercilessly bounded by gravity.

Cold and hard, abandoned in the deepest corner of the street.

Like a dead man's glacial eyeball

A shooting star crossed.

As a black star, I wished to it.

At least, can someone notice, and write me a lullaby,
Sing me to sleep.

Heroin Heroine

Daphne Leung

My name is Anne Layton. I was born in the remarkable heat of India. My Anglo-Indian family lived in Patna, the largest city in Bengal. I was unlike most children as I grew up. The trying climate rendered them with effete spirits and weak bones; some of them were only babies when they died from infectious diseases like cholera or laryngitis. The heat also drained away most of our strength, leaving pale cheeks breathless – but not me. I was in love with the warmth, the colours and emotions of Bengal. When I was young, mother always insisted I put on a sunhat, the *topi*, to protect me from the exotic sun together with bed sheets tied around my little ankles to protect me from mosquito bites. I always imagined I was on an adventurous expedition with a graceless helmet where I ventured into mysterious temples and dangerous jungles with a wooden stick, pretending to fend off poisonous cobras or to fight off notorious Bengal tigers with a fire bush. At least, that was what my ayah (my nanny) told me in her Indian tales and stories.

I remember vividly how mother would sit in a cane chair on the veranda, holding her parasol and inspecting the work of the *mali* growing English flowers in our back garden despite the oppressively hot weather – one of mother's many steadfast,

hopeless ambitions she hoped to achieve. Roses, peonies and freesias were some of her favourites. I never understood why. Why grow something that will eventually die with a great amount of effort? Mother adored damask roses and encouraged our *mali* to grow them with different methods despite failures. She would say they were in fashion back at Home. Home? Home where? England, my dear. England.

‘And one day when you grow up you need to attend boarding school in Sussex or Hampshire where Aunt Rachel or Aunt Lilly can take care of you – because you deserve a good education in England as well’

‘Why? Mother, won’t you and father come too?’

Mother looked at me with a disheartened expression and did not reply me. She only brushed my hair gently with her hand. When I grew up I realised she was torn between choosing to stay with father in India or to go back Home. But this decision has never needed to be made.

One day, mother woke up with a splitting headache and she never left her bed. For days I was kept away from mother’s room. Only our family doctor, Dr James and a few servants were allowed in to take care of her. And every night father would sit quietly in the library alone in his armchair; smoking with a wooden pipe I had never seen before and sometimes choked with faint sobs.

I needed to find out the truth. I peered in mother’s room and in front of me was a strange sight I could not fathom. A

smoky haze under the soft sunlight from the thin chintz curtain illuminated the room by the windowpane. And there mother lay in her bed, shy from the light, looking pale in bed, smoking from a dimly lit pipe with the help of *ayah*. The smell of the smoke was familiar but largely intensified...it was the smell of father, and the smell of what he was smoking in the library. He has always had this distinctive faint smell on him, a smell I never liked, but reminded me of him. Father was always very strict about any presence of the content he trades appearing at home. And I realised then what he stressed so much, was opium. But when mother was sick, it was all over the house.

In minutes mother drifted to a deep coma, like a corpse with a satisfying curb of blood thirst. I studied her face carefully, her chestnut hair colour faded, her face, haggard with sunken cheekbones protruding, a face I hardly recognised. My breathing quickened and overwhelming anger took charge. Tears flushed my eyes. They were trying to kill mother! How could they do this! I wailed and ran straight to *ayah* and hit her with my small fists. I was carried away screaming and kicking by her down the corridor.

‘Shh. Shh. Little Annie,’ *Ayah* cuddling me in her small arms but fat legs. ‘Don’t cry. Memsahib ill.’

But I still didn’t understand.

In less than a week, mother died. And the house mourned with us. I was eight years old.

Mali promised to plant the flowers mother admired. For

memsahib, he said, as he handed me a white rose for mother.

‘India is not place for a woman,’ Father only said.

It is true that no one in India died old because there were no old people. It was indeed not a place for women or children. Mother was buried in the South Park Street Cemetery, another place I grew to know so well because I would often run away from home to visit mother on her grave along the years. I would tell Mother about horse riding, how our chef made secretive profits in his daily visit at the bazaar and had greatly improved his culinary skills

‘It was fortunate you corrected his disregard of hygiene too, mother,’ I spoke to her. ‘But most of all how much father and I have missed you.’

And that’s when I heard the crying of a child. Distant, yet distinct. I followed the sound on the turn of the streets and there I saw, with two dead bodies lying on the front porch, each holding a bamboo pipe, the cheapest kinds with the break of the stem of the bamboo and inside plucked with... poppies. Indian poppies. Opium. And near them sat a little girl no more than 5 years old, scrawny little poor thing, crying with all her remaining strength for the death of her parents.

To my horror their lifeless faces resembled a saddening sight I never seemed to be able to forget, that day in mother’s room, the very expression. But their bones were visibly naked, tightly bounded by hanging skins, with no flesh and blood left. It

was a common thing for some Indians to buy or steal opium, as they were so widely available. If addicted, they would use their last rupee in the household for poppies, and then pawned everything in their possession, in the end even the wife and daughters were sold – all for these pea-size opium balls scattered over the ground in front of my eyes. I went home to bring the little girl mangoes and some leftover chapattis from this morning's *chota hazri* (an early light breakfast) but when I came back she was already gone. And I was left as lost and shattered as the day I found out mother died in fact of typhoid fever; the day I found out father gave mother opium to relieve her pain as much as it devastated him; the day I found out father was slowly addicted to opium himself after mother's death.

A few years passed and our family carried on as usual. I depended on father and he me. He had spent more time with me than when mother was still alive. But on weekends, father's business partners would sometimes come and visit.

'My dear friend, some fine cases of claret fresh from the sea – sherry, madeira and a few bottles of brandy,' said Mr Weeding.

They resided as usual in the dining room for Sunday tiffin, carrying out business talks. They seldom drank at lunch, except sometimes for a beer. This time, they decided to drink Mr Weeding's Madeira wine and soon with much drunken enthusiasm they spoke loudly and cheerfully. And I pressed my ears as tightly

and as closely as I could on the dining room door.

‘Have you heard my friend? This year we have shipped seven thousand more chests to Canton than last year. And you imagined 1837 was a good year!’ chanted Mr Weeding.

‘Our opium is still the best,’ said Mr Lyall. ‘The Turks and Persia do not stand any chance. And may I say we are still taking the lead at the auction in Calcutta, Malwa is only selling it between \$720 and \$490 as market price.’

‘...but with the accident happened last week in The Drying Room, I am afraid for this year...’ father said.

‘My dear friend,’ Mr Weeding interrupted. ‘No matter how adulterated our opium may become as it reaches China, they still find Bengal opium attractive. It is a matter of showing off their wealth, those vain Chinese smokers. We are to remain our prices between \$940 and \$625 and as highly as possible.’

‘May the highest bidder win, gentlemen. And cheers to another year of great year of this sinister beauty,’ Mr Lyall said.

Father suddenly spoke upon the laughter.

‘Did you not wish at times, that you don’t trade drugs but other chests of...indigo, or raw silk, or raw cotton? Or be a pensioner. Work twenty hard, good years of your life and live a wealthy life with your family.’

There was silence.

‘What are you talking about William? You are the best man we have who have an eye for good quality Indian poppies. With a

hold and sniff of raw opium, you can tell the texture, the mass and...,' Mr Lyall asked, confused.

'Yes, my friend, but what does that do? Opium only teaches one thing, which is that aside from physical suffering and bringing family to ruins – there is nothing real.'

I held my breath for as long as I could remember. I know it was time to do what had to be done.

When dinner was served, as our *khidmutgar* (servant at the table) served us our mulligatawny soup with my favourite naan (English bread was unable to be achieved due to poor quality of flour, yeast, butter and different ovens in India), I proposed my idea to father.

'Father, may I accompany you to the Agency House tomorrow?'

Father looked at me with raised eyebrows, but slowly showed a smile.

'Well, I don't see why not.'

'Is it very far from the house?' I asked, plotting in my head.

'About thirty minutes with the horses.'

That would take more than thirty minutes to walk then. We ate our molten curries with rice and some tinned turkey (shipped all the way from England) as I shared with father what I learnt today for Latin grammar, which was an absolute bore but it made him pleased to know I was indeed a good student. And some real plum puddings with real brandy sauce that Mr Weeding was so

kind to bring over this afternoon. I remember the night clearly because it was the last dinner with father when he was happy, and I was happy, when we were both happy.

When father took me to the Opium Factory, the magnitude of its scale was beyond the imaginings of a fourteen-year-old. There was the never ending rows of opium in The Drying Room; The Balling room where factory workers produced cakes of opium and then store them in The Stacking Room that was at least as tall as three floors, and the workers store all the cakes by climbing up and down an enormously long bamboo ladder – the smell of the opium was worst here. I was astonished by the least expectancy I had for my father’s job, and mostly, for the suffering this could bring to people in India and Canton. These were all to be smuggled.

As father was busy speaking with more businessmen, I secretly took away the key to father’s office hanging from his belt. As I walked the trail we past and scrutinised the rooms again, I decided I should focus on The Stacking Room to carry out my plan. But first I must steal the room’s keys because each room as I noticed had locks to them. I opened the door to Father’s office with the office key and the decorations of his offices were full sets of different elaborate opium pipes, some made of ivory or ebony, and with a long needle, a lamp and some opium paste in a container. There was also a large set of scales for measuring opium. For a second I had forgotten my purpose of being there, lost in

bewilderment of what father was working for, and what he was working with. I felt disgusted but as I walked to his working table I saw a picture frame of our family. I remembered the day we took this. I was six and we were having a family picnic...

I wiped my tears and started to scavenge father's drawers for the key to the Stacking Room. I realised I didn't know which key was for which room. So I bet on the chain with three keys and returned father's key without his knowing of. And I told myself tonight would be the night to end this.

I waited until the house drifted into silence and left the house with my bag of water, matchboxes, keys and a large wooden stick to walk and for me to fend off any wild animals on my way. It was the longest walk I had.

When I finally reached the factory, it was only then I saw big carvings of 'British East India Company' on the closed door of The Stacking Room. The first two keys I tried proved futile, as I prayed and hoped the third key would work, I heard a growling moan behind me. As a daughter of Bengal, I knew very well this was not any ordinary large sized animal – it was a king cobra. And with a turn of head, I saw a dark slim figure under the faint moonlight, and the reflection of its beautiful smooth scales. A graceful, deadly creature had its tongue out teasing the air, teasing my fear. I carefully turned the key in my hand and I heard a gentle 'click'. I swallowed hard and pushed my back against the door as hard as I could. I turned swiftly to close the door. For the first time,

the smell of opium calmed me and made me felt safe ironically.

I lit a match in search of the long ladder, I climbed each step pondering upon this action I was about to take, and with each step I gained more confidence. As I reached almost the top I lit another match, and like a glowing hope, I threw it into the closest cake of opium in front of me. The smoke happened in a blink; soon the whole row of opium cakes was on fire. I slid down the ladder. Near the ground, I found a few chests of opium. I opened the closest box and drew out a dried but gluey dark substance. These were processed opium. I held it tight in my hand and looked up to take in the smell of opium, and the sight of opium burning with a victorious smile.

Father was furious when he found out, beyond words to express his anger. But also extremely grateful I was safe. I only managed to burn down half of the factory before some workers nearby discovered the smoke. He said I had given him no choice but to send me back to England, a punishment that was least expected, that mother would have hoped for me to go back. And I knew he was right.

England was a cruel and cold land. Dull and dreadful. My life in India seemed far away from me. However, when I held in my hand that dried but gluey dark substance, I felt the enduring fire of Bengal burning before my eyes.

Detached

Alleys, bushes, behind the wire gauze,
anywhere the city walkers forgotten,
found whiskers and footprints by your paws.

You, as anonymous,
behold the cities
through your luminosity.
We, blinded with identities,
are surveilled
under the machinery.

Arrogant, you may seem.
Detached from the constellation
you know you are, and do not care.

Wherever you rest your paws upon,
wherever the utopia is.

Night Float

Boat,
Just a lonely boat.
Out there,
By the furious sea.
No signal,
Nor direction.
I'm alone.

Moments of dark,
Moments of silence.
Strangers at night,
Greetings they whispered.
Back there at the pier,
Winds are growling loud,
Asking me to leave.

Tides pushing me back,
Seagulls leave me a hint,
Hide your face of fear.
Lighthouse at the beach,
Shining tender rays,

Seems like guiding me,
To a safer route.

They stayed Old,
They looked far,
Enough experience,
Enough reason,
To lead me through.
Or should I follow,
Like a fool?

Leah, Ellen, Danielle, Karine

Belinda Ip

I went to Wan Chai this afternoon to fix my bracelet. It is a gift from my group of friends. We were so bounded to this district: we had our secondary school life here, we hung around here, and some of us even lived here. After graduation from secondary school, we still have our reunion nearby. We tend to go to restaurants and coffee shops that we have been to. Perhaps it is a way to miss the past, or it is just a matter of convenience. We used to walk along these streets every day in those days. I could recite all the shops there: the toyshops, the stationary shops, the bookstore, the restaurants.... We have been to most of them numerous times.

I have to visit my grandma this evening. So I decided to grab the chance to walk from Wan Chai to Causeway Bay after they have fixed my bracelet.

Star Street

The shop was located on Star Street, according to their official website. Yet I could not find the shop after walking along the street for 15 minutes. I could not believe the empty shop in front of me is the shop I have been looking for. The bracelet was bought a couple of weeks ago by my friends. I took out my phone

and Googled the shop, they didn't change their address. It is still the one I am standing at. I could do nothing but walk away, walking down the little slope where I used to walk by every couple of weeks.

Leah

I used to go to Leah's place very often. She is a friend of mine who lived nearby and has moved to Tuen Mun four years ago. I went there so often simply because it was near the school. I remember her mother once treated me the very strange strawberry pork for lunch during the exam period.

'Let's try this new dish out!' said Leah's mother, as she took out a big plate of reddish-pork. The strange scent of cooked strawberry filled the room.

'What is it, mom?'

'It's strawberry pork! I learnt it from the TV programme yesterday,' said Leah's mother proudly.

By the time we all tried it, the room went silent. It was the first time I tried her mother's cooking, and I realised why Leah was that skinny. I felt blessed, growing up with my father's cooking, and being fat.

I miss the sound of her Chinese zither. The one she has played in front of me before her examinations. I recall that I made an omelette in her kitchen, simply because we were hungry during revision.

I was also reminded that one time we dined downstairs at a *dai pai dong*. Everything seems so close yet so far away. The memories are fresh but everything else has gone. No more meeting up at her place after school, no more *dai pai dong*.

Queen's Road East

I stopped by the road as the traffic light went from green to red. I looked at the buildings and shops in front of me. There used to be a toy shop at the corner. I used to go there with my brother before and after having tuition class in the building next to it. I have never bought a toy there. The toys there were mainly figures and robots. It was a paradise for boys, not me. It has become a boutique now. I passed by and saw the bakery, the very old bakery. I was glad to see it there. I enjoyed eating the freshly baked buns and most of all, their chocolate cookies. Cookies have sold out today, so I bought a bun only. The bakery is owned by the parents of two boys who I have met in the tuition class. Turning left, I saw the shop selling handbag, which used to be a sundry store.

Ellen

‘Look at these! The ducklings are so cute! Quack, quack!’ I said, pretending to be that duckling.

‘It’s the millionth time you used the word ‘cute’. Won’t you get bored?’

‘But it’s cute! And look at this! This pencil case is so pretty!’

I remember someone said that she will make me a pencil case, *half* a year ago!

‘It takes time. Do you want a nice one or an ugly one?’

I turned away, ignoring her question, and kept wandering in the shop looking this and that. We got into this shop accidentally and I couldn’t help but love every single item in the shop. She was like a mother looking after a child. I have always been childish. She spotted a pair of silver vintage rings, which came beautifully in a wooden jewellery box. The edges of the rings were slightly rusted but they were still so pretty.

‘This is really nice! Shall we try them on?’ I said.

They fitted our fingers perfectly. We wanted to buy them immediately but they were expensive. We were students and we couldn’t afford them.

‘I think they suit you two. How about I keep them for you for three months, if you have got enough money by then, you come back and take them home? How does it sound?’ the shopkeeper said.

She wrote down ‘E-L-L-E-N’ on a piece of paper and handed it back to the shopkeeper.

We didn’t go back three months later. She was with another girl. A year later, I went by and found the shop has turned into a shop selling tea. We are never going to get back those rings. We are never going to get back together. Things are never going to be the same.

Tai Yuen Street

The heat of a teardrop woke me up as it slid down my face. I kept walking to get myself away from the memory of that pair of rings. I have been walking so quickly that I did not realise what shops I passed by. Suddenly, I was in front of Tai Yuen Street. Tai Yuen Street is also known as the ‘Toy Street’, for it has so many toyshops. More importantly, almost all kinds of toys could be found here. Some of them have pirated versions of toys, so even poorer kids could come and buy toys here.

Danielle

I have always been a very childish person and so was Danielle. One day, we were 19, Danielle was on the phone with me and she saw an advertisement on a magazine.

‘Oh mine! Tamagotchi is having their fifth generation! You know they can now make friends, get married and even give birth to children!’ said Danielle excitedly.

‘Wow! That sounds interesting. But I thought that’s quite an old function isn’t it?’ I answered with doubts.

‘Yea... but we didn’t have that when we were small, did we?’

‘OK you’re right. We’re kind of old,’ I said, with laughter.

We met later that day and passed by Tai Yuen Street. Not surprisingly, we went into a shop and bought two Tamagotchi.

Tamagotchi is a mini gadget that allows players to culture a virtue pet. The 'owner' needs to feed and take care of the 'pet' so that it will 'grow'. It was a popular toy back when we were in primary schools. We were obviously too old for this, but we did not care. People stared at us and talked about us at the back, simply because we were different from them. How narrow their minds are.

Yet, we did not have the perseverance to raise the 'pets'. We were done two months later. It was Christmas time and we were busy to party, to play, to have fun. The gadgets became a member of those abandoned toys, which had been accumulated since we had our second piece of toy, in our life, in our childhood.

Johnston Road

At the end of Tai Yuen Street comes Johnston Road. There used to be a Chinese Restaurant on the right hand side. It was there before I was born. When I thought it will be a landmark of Wan Chai forever, it was pulled down. The whole building has gone and is re-building into a modern architecture. On the opposite side, there is a three-story bookstore. It is the place where my group of best friends used to hang around in our F.5 and F.6. We fought for the first public exam in our life and had been through the dark, tough years together. After that exam, we had a long summer break, like three months instead of one and a half. To make good use of time, some candidates go travelling. Yet not everyone can afford a trip, or has spent all his/her money on a trip. For these

people, they may get a summer job.

Karine

Karine spent all her money in her trip to Japan. When she got back, she got herself a job at the bookstore to earn the money back. The rest of us had stopped working for the last month of our summer holiday. As Karine plays the role of leader in our group, we visited her at the bookstore quite often. We chatted when she was free and read books when she was not. There was a period that I was very upset because I was the only one in our group who failed to further study in our school after the public exam. One day I went to find Karine by myself.

‘Hi. How may I help you?’ said Karine, pretending to be serving me instead of chatting with me in front of the manager.

‘I just dropped by.’ I did not have the mood to play this game. Plus we all knew that the manager has recognised every member of our group already.

Karine handed me a memo:

Tips for a better life:

1. *Feeling pity for oneself is useless.*
2. *Don't be greedy.*
3. *Make things happen.*

‘You should feel thankful that you have got a place in

another school. You were so lazy but you managed to get a place. What you should do now is to work things out. Avoid making the same mistake,' said Karine.

I always think that Karine is the wisest person in our group. It is not equivalent to the academic context (though she has it done pretty well too). She reads a lot and what she says always inspires us. That day we went on talking for three more hours until I had to go for dinner.

Wan Chai Road

As I walked along Johnston Road, it joined Wan Chai Road, another road floods with memory. There is the snack shop where we used to buy candies and chips after school; the tuck shop where we had tofu; the fast food shop where we used to stay for hours; the CD shop where we bought 90% of our CDs; the photocopy shop where we made illegal copies of past papers.

We did not have a lot of pocket money at that time, and we were struggling through the public exam. Yet, we were so happy as long as we are together. We spent a little, though that's all we had, and got unlimited laughter and happiness.

Soon I reached Causeway Bay, another place with loads of memories. It is close to Wan Chai so we often come here too. Changing seems happened faster in Causeway Bay. In my eyes, there are only Jewellery shops, watches shops, cosmetic shops and handbag shops. Our cinema has gone. Our sweet soup shop has

gone. Our coffee shop has gone. And our bookstore has gone. This is not the Causeway Bay that I recognise. I had the urge to cry but I didn't want to do it in the crowd. I looked back to Wan Chai, hoping that it can stay as what it is for as long as possible.

Jiang Peng, Jolie

Suffer Little Children to Come Unto Me

Dear baby, sleep well

There will be no more rush of footsteps mixed with screaming
around

and explosion like firework that always made your attempt to
dream fail

Let the thick black surround you, singing the cradle song

Let the wind bring you the saline taste of ocean

that taste of deck saturated with sea water, also of your hometown

Let the sunshine knit up a sweater when winter comes

If it rains, your little house will protect you from getting wet

Let the insects and you have a friendly chat

and let the birds lead you into the golden door of music

which your father was so good at

Don't let our eyesight disturb your dream

where kisses are gentle, words are soft

the two people who love you most in the world lovingly smile

Now that you sleep deeply, never awake

Dear baby, sleep well

I visited Stanley Military Cemetery, where those who died in the Japanese invasion on Hong Kong were buried. I found this gravestone and decided to write a poem for its owner. The inscription reads: *CHILD, AGED 1 YEAR. THE BELOVED SON OF G.MEANY, BAND MASTER.*



Worlds Apart

I close my eyes, let hours slip by,
transported to a different time.

I close my eyes, and open my mind,
to visions where the stars align.

I open my eyes, to a world where I
breathe underwater and soar through the sky.

I open my eyes, to a world where I
am never, ever, objectified.

I open my eyes, and see it so clearly,
the world where I belong so dearly.

I close my eyes, embraced by vines,
which once again, swiftly entwine.

I shut my eyes, race against time,
try so hard, to escape from the vines.

I shut my eyes, grasp at loose ends,
desperate not to comprehend.

I rub my eyes, again aware,
of a world that was, never there.

Ignorance is Bliss

Intentions. Illusions
Realities. Deceit.
In this world,
she learnt to retreat.

Alone,
licking wounds,
from borrowed time.
She'll practice her line
of saying she's fine.

Fresh bruises on her back,
smile plastered on her face,
She'll keep up the charade,
saying 'everything's okay'.

Skyfall

Wong Hiu Tung, Flora

‘Skyfall’

A song is playing inside John’s head as he waits anxiously. The loud noise of the helicopter irritates him. It gives him a headache as the noise is clashing with the song playing in his head. It further annoys him because he can’t stop the song playing in his head. ‘Oh My God! What am I doing up here?’ he can’t help asking himself again and again.

‘This is the end...’

It was pouring. Both of them stood in the street under the rain. He stared at his Swedish girlfriend. Her face looked familiar to him but her expression was not. He had never seen her in such determination. Her lips were pursed up into a thin line. The noise of pouring rain covered most of her voice but he could still make out what she had said. His face was blank, suggesting he was still processing the information he just took in.

‘Hold your breath and count to ten...’

‘You’re okay?’ Martin asks.

‘I’m not,’ John answers. ‘In every way,’ he adds in his mind. He is having butterflies in his stomach. The air is stiff here. He needs fresh air. But there is none. The helicopter brings them higher. His eyes are wet thinking of her. He blinks his eyes. His

expression freezes, as if he can't believe he lets his emotions out so easily in front of others. He turns his head away quickly, trying to hide himself. Uneasiness floats between the two of them. Martin starts talking again.

'Hold your breath and count to ten before taking off. It helps. I like to think I am falling from the sky when I parachute. You will fall in love in...?' Martin continues speaking for a long time without pausing. John listens to his friend in silence with a blank face.

'Feel the earth move and then...?'

His whole world crumbled before him that day, swallowing him into hopeless darkness. Rain dropped on his black and plain umbrella heavily. He couldn't hold the umbrella properly because his hand was shaking. Cars passed by, splashing water up to pedestrians. The bottom part of his pants and his socks were soaking wet. Watching her walk away made him feel like his sky fell. Funny enough, she once told him 'skyfall' meant a lot of rain in Swedish. He muttered 'Please, don't!' for a few times. It is hard to decide if she heard it or not. She didn't stop. He heard the 'Kok, kok, kok...' sound made by her heels became softer and softer, then covered by the noise of cars rushing by.

'Hear my heart burst again...?'

He looks outside the window. Sweat is dripping from his nose tip. He rubs his forehead with his palm, hoping to wipe off some sweat. It is marvellous to see the whole city from above.

Buildings which shoot up the sky look like tiny toys now. The city is like exhibits in Legoland. He laughs at the idea. The anxiety he has just experienced is slightly relieved. He looks at the scenery with such an interest that his nose is almost sticking to the window. Seeing his beloved city under his feet gets him excited for what he is going to try for the first time in his life. His heart is bumping so fast that he doubts if it will burst. He can hear its ‘Bub-bob, bub-bob, bub-bob’ sound echoing in his chest.

‘For this is the end,’ he says

‘Oh, John. Stop drinking!’ Martin yelled.

John glared at his side. He couldn’t make out the face of his best friend. He couldn’t see straight anymore. The glass of wine had been slipping from his hand. He tried once last time to grab it, no luck. He cursed. It must know some tricks to escape from his grasp. Hot liquid was lingering in his stomach, making him incredibly uncomfortable and hot. He felt like throwing up. His head was heavy. He thought of the years. All his youth spent with her. He tried to be a reliable man when he was just a playful boy. He had never tried anything interesting or adventurous. He gave up a lot of dreams for her sense of security. But, she gave him up.

‘I’ve drowned and dreamt this moment,’ he says.

Fresh and cold air fills up John’s lung when the door is pulled open. Strong wind storms in the tiny helicopter, brushing every single hair on his skin. He feels much better. The disgusting

smell of sweat has been troubling him. The wind also blows away his anxious mind. He looks down, thrilled by both the sight and the knowledge that he is about to fall from the sky. His small eyes widened to almost twice of his former size. His throat dries. Smile creeps to his face without his notice. He is about to do what he has been dreaming of.

‘So overdue, I own them,’ he says.

Martin’s mouth widen by half when he heard John’s plan. His face stoned for a while, then his eyes went through every details of the shabby man’s face. He admitted he was seriously thinking if the man in front of him might not be his best friend later. John’s eyes shine with determination. He had been holding back his own desires for too long. He had to follow his heart.

‘Let the sky fall, when it crumbles...’

Nothing is quite similar to the feeling he is experiencing right now. He is falling from the sky. Watching the black helicopter leaving him further and further away until its figure is as tiny as the tip of his finger. Hearing air rush past his ears at an incredibly high speed. Feeling the cold wind pass through his limbs, the uneasiness of being upside-down, dizziness, the huge pressure that is squeezing his body. These are all brand new to John. He has an urge to scream, not because of fear but excitement. And he screams out loud. He never thought he could see the sky this way. It is just within his grip. His world suddenly seems so small from the one he is seeing right now. The sight of large city under his

body excites him. Her face crashes into pieces in front of this sight. The wind blows away his sadness. He feels fresh and full of energy when he lands on ground. He stands straight on the grass, looking up to the sky he just falls from, humming:

‘We will stand tall, face it all together, at Skyfall...?’

When Strangers Meet

*Chan Ho Long James, Fung Chun Ming Colin,
Ip Nga Yi Katherine, Janice Lo and Yeun Wing Yin Wings*

Characters

John

Sarah

Franco

Jenny

Script

(John is standing in the elevator, Sarah enters.)

John: Which floor, ma'am?

Sarah (glances at John): 9th, please.

(John pushes the button for the 9th floor followed by the door close button, elevator doors remain open)

John: Hmmm.....

Sarah (irritated): What's going on? Is it broken or something?

John (looks reassuring): Don't worry, the lifts here are always like this. Jabbing the button a couple times always does the trick.

(John presses the door close button several more times until the lift doors close. The lift ascends.)

Sarah (looks impatient yet relieved): Finally! (leans onto the railing)

John: Sometimes you just need a bit of patience. You look like you're in a rush, where are you... (The lift wavers and shudders to a stop. The lights flicker, then go out.)

Sarah: What's going on?

John: I think this thing's not working.

Sarah: You've gotta be kidding me. Why is everything so screwed up? (repeatedly presses the open door button.)

John: I don't think that's gonna work. We're stuck.

Sarah: We're stuck!? As in stuck, here, not moving? (Moves to the doors) Someone! Anyone! (Starts pounding on the doors and attempts to pull them apart.)

John (calmly): Calm down. That's not gonna do any good, we might as well wait for help. Someone will come soon.

(John presses the alarm button)

(Alarm sounds)

John (reassuringly): See, someone is bound to hear that. All we need to do now is wait.

(Lift shakes)

Sarah: (Grabs hold of the railings) Wait?! What do you mean wait?! Didn't you feel that? We're gonna die? We're gonna plunge to our deaths or run out of oxygen or something. Help me pry the doors open!

John: I've already rung the bell. Stay calm and everything will be fine. I am a policeman. (Pauses and corrects himself) I mean...I was a policeman but trust me, we'll be fine.

Sarah: I'm afraid of the dark. I can't see anything in here. Why is it so dark? I feel like I can't breathe.

(John takes out his phone and switches on the flashlight application. Light from his phone floods the lift.)

John: (Grabs Sarah's shoulders with his two hands and looks reassuringly into her eyes) Trust me, it's going to be fine. Everything's going to be fine. I've come across a lot of these cases before. It helps if you don't panic. We'll be outta here sooner than you know. (Slowly sinks down to a sitting position and pats the floor next to him.)

Sarah: (Slowly sits down and takes her phone out) Okay, I'm calm, I'm calm.

(Sarah looks down at her phone and stares at it for several seconds)

John: (Glancing down at Sarah's phone before returning his gaze on her) I don't think you'll be able to make any calls, there's no reception

Sarah: I'm not planning on calling anyone or anything. I just...(She glances at the background of her phone's lock screen.)

(John looks down at her phone and sees a photo of Sarah and a guy.)

John: (Nodding his head towards the phone and looks at Sarah) Your husband?

Sarah: No, just...just my boyfriend. (Pauses.) Though, I'm not sure if that's the case anymore.

John: How come?

(Sarah takes a deep breath)

John: Look, if you don't want to talk about it, it's fine. I thought that you were having a bad day and maybe wanna talk about it.

Sarah: No, it's not just *a* bad day. I've been having a rough time all over.

John: What do you mean?

Sarah: There're so many problems, my life is falling apart.

John: Problems, everyone's got problems. We all hit a rough patch every now and then, but you don't see everyone falling apart. That's because things always work out in the end.

Sarah: That's true. But...sometimes it's so hard. It's so hard to...

John: Do you still love him?

Sarah: Yes, of course, but...

John (interrupts Sarah): Then what's wrong? If you love him, it's worth fixing.

Sarah: But he's been acting so strangely recently.

John: What do you mean?

Sarah: He's been acting suspiciously.

John: Suspicious? Like how?

Sarah: (shaking her head solemnly and stresses on every word) I don't know.

John: You don't know or you don't want to know?

Sarah (irritated): I don't know, he's just been acting weird okay?

John: Well, tell me, what's going on, maybe I can help.

Sarah: Alright, alright. Let me start from the beginning.

John: I'm listening.

Sarah: It's like this... we've been dating for six years, and things have been going pretty well....well at least I thought it was.

John: Mhmm.

Sarah: I met him at my first internship, and was attracted to him the moment I lay eyes on him. (Counting on each finger as though checking off a checklist) Smart, good-looking, charming yet down-to earth. I mean he's really mature for his age and everything I've ever wanted. What's not to love? (Glances at John)

(John nods)

Sarah: And above all, he treats me really well. He cares about how I feel and respects my opinions. Up till a month ago, I thought we would be in it for the long haul, but once he got promoted he started acting weirdly. (Slight frown, furrowed brows)

John: Like?

Sarah: He hasn't been calling or texting, and whenever we do talk, he avoids my eye-contact and hesitates whenever I tell him I love him. Something's up, I feel like he's been distancing himself from me. Every time I ask him if he has something he needs to tell me, he stays silent and shakes his head, but I can see it in his eyes, there's something that's eating him up inside. He used to tell me everything, but now...now I'd be lucky to even hear him say 'I love you'. He called me just now, said he had something important to say to me. That's why I'm here, he's waiting for me at the

restaurant upstairs. I think he wants to... (hesitates) he wants to...(Sarah is on the verge of tears)

John: (sighs) Things might not always work out the way we want to, but trust me, sometimes it's for the best.

(Sarah glances down, sighs and shakes her head)

John: Stiffen up! Be strong.

Sarah: I think it's Jenny.

John (confused): What? Jenny?

Sarah: We work together. She *used to be* my best friend. Now? Now I think she's sneaking around with Franco. She's such a bitch, I can't believe she stole Franco from me. I mean, she knew how much Franco means to me.

John: Hang on a sec. Jenny was your best friend so I guess you knew her well?

Sarah: Yes, ever since university. You know, there's that something about her, but I guess I was wrong.

John: You must have trusted her at one point?

Sarah: Yes, but now she's stolen Franco from me.

John: Are you sure that's what's happened?

(Sarah waits for a few second)

Sarah: Well, that's what I'm here for, to find out.

John: Then think of it this way. If they *are* sneaking around behind your back, why is your boyfriend bothering to meet *you* upstairs?

Sarah: To break up with me. I just know it. I might as well find

out if they're together.

John: Don't be silly, he wouldn't be bringing you to such a fancy restaurant if he wanted to break things off. You're thinking too much.

Sarah: You don't know how many times I've tried to convince myself otherwise. I want to believe in us, but he's not the man I fell in love with anymore. He's changed.

John: Wait. You're really overthinking things. He probably has a lot to deal with, with the new promotion and all that. He might be just stressed and too tired.

Sarah: Well...it could be 'cause of his promotion. (Hesitates as though thinking it through, then shakes her head) But no, no, it isn't. I've seen the way he is around Jenny, the secret glances, the lingering smiles. He meets her in the pantry when he thinks I'm not looking. The other day, I checked his call records and saw that he called Jenny several times last week. I mean it's so obvious.

John: From what I've heard, I guess you're thinking in the wrong way. From a man's perspective, we won't stop loving a girl all of a sudden, especially since you two have been dating for what...six years?

(Sarah nods)

John: Well, that's quite a long period of time. I don't know if you're in the same situation, but when I met my wife, I knew she was the one. I dated her for three years before we decided to settle down and get married, but I thought of her more as my wife than

girlfriend. Trust me, men don't change so suddenly.

Sarah: I really hope so. But, then how do you explain all of this?

John: Maybe it's 'cause of work, or money, or you. Probably money and women I mean. Wait, what's his name again? And how old is he?

Sarah: I didn't mention it before. He's called Franco (smiles to herself), he's thirty now.

John: I see. At this age, men have a lot of things to care about. Turning thirty means a lot to us. When I turned thirty, I was planning to get married that year and start a family, so I tried to save up money. I struggled a lot at that time 'cause everything was outside of my comfort zone. I was interviewed for the position of senior officer at that time. The good thing was I succeeded. I could not imagine how my life would be now if I didn't get promoted.

Sarah: Good for you. (Smiles, but it doesn't reach her eyes)

John: That wasn't the end of the story. After I got promoted, my new position took too much effort and I neglected my family, it became the thing I regretted most, even to this day.

Sarah: Oh, I'm so sorry about that. What happened?

John: (Sighs) It's a boring story and I don't think you'd be interested in it.

Sarah: Tell me your story, just like I did.

(John hesitates)

John: Okay. Actually it's very simple. I have a daughter and she's

my only child. She recently got married and I feel that I've lost her completely. I mean, before she moved out, we still weren't that close, but it was better than now. I feel as though she's become a total stranger, living her life without me. She doesn't call or come back home anymore. I feel as though I don't know her anymore. There's just something between us, pushing us further away from each other. (Pauses to think) Mind you, she still cares about her mum, they talk on the phone once or twice a week but she doesn't talk to me at all.

Sarah: That's it?

John: Isn't that enough?

Sarah: As an outsider, I can tell that you still love her.

John: You can, huh? But she hasn't a clue.

Sarah: There are loads of things to work on or worry about. I'm not married but from what I've seen from some friends that have recently gotten married, I can already tell that. The new home, the new life, mortgages, children, cars and all that, you know it better than I do. Think about when *you* got married. You had so many things to worry about, your whole life changed.

John: Hm.....still, I don't know.

Sarah: (Imitating John earlier) You don't know or do you just don't want to think about it?

John: Alright, I admit it. I am, maybe, too mean towards her sometimes. But all I wanted was to make sure that she's fine.

Sarah: I know you care about her. Otherwise, you wouldn't have

bothered. But trust me. It's really nothing.

John: Really?

Sarah: Absolutely! But let me ask you a question from a daughter's point of view. Why is it always us daughters that need to reach out? Why can't you reach out?

John: Why should it be me that calls her first?

Sarah: Wait, are you telling me that you haven't been talking to your daughter?

John: Me? Calling Natalie? No way.

Sarah: See? That's the problem right there. Maybe you could just call her and ask if she's doing well. You know, simple chit-chat.

John: What do you mean simple chit-chat? How would I know what to say to her?

Sarah: It's easy. Just talk to her, like how you're talking to me right now.

John: Easy?! How is that easy?

Sarah: Forget it. Just focus on the here and now. The minute we get out, pick up the phone and call her. It doesn't matter who makes the call as long as you guys are talking to each other.

John: But isn't that a bit weird?

Sarah: Nothing weird about a father calling his own daughter.

John: Should I?

Sarah: Don't think too much. Take action!

John: Okay... (Hangs his head and furrows his brows) when we get out of here, I'll try.

(Someone bangs the door from the outside)

Fireman: This is the Hong Kong Fire Services Department. Stay away from the door. We will pry open the doors and get you to safety.

Sarah: Finally!

(John picks up his phone)

(John and Sarah stand up and back into the wall of the elevator.)

Firemen: On Three. One. Two Three!

(The doors open)

(Jenny rushes to hug her)

Jenny (Worried): Oh my gosh, are you alright?

Sarah (Crossed): What are you doing here?

Jenny: I was so worried!

Sarah: You haven't answered my question.

(Jenny backs off, shocked)

(Franco rushes out)

Franco: Thank god! You're fine.

Sarah: (Points at Jenny) What is *she* doing here?

Franco: She came here for us.

Sarah: What do you mean *us*? There *is* no us. You're here for *her*!

Franco: What?

Jenny: (Shakes her head and looks at Franco) Just tell her.

(Franco looks at Jenny and pauses)

Franco: I'm not here for *her*. I'm here to propose to *you*.

(Franco grabs Sarah's hand, reaches into his pocket for the ring)

box and pulls her aside)

(John takes out his phone)

John (Speaks into the receiver): Hi, Natalie, it's me...

What's the Maths for This?

A heavy heart to carry
a burden to bury
love flees in a scurry
Why the hurry?

Pained to be touched
for it will leave a scotching burn
But even more so, an aching yearn
for more, and more, and much more...

Care for your care
Long for your longingness.
....Yet
Word for word
Wound for wound
WAR for WAR.

Quivering questions are pointless ponderers.
Juvenile justifications become illogical illustrations of
a bar chart to show efforts
a line chart to demonstrate behaviours

a pie chart to measure love...
Drunk on debating dialogues
Sunk in speechless sighs
Lost in loathing lies
Cost in countless calamity

But who's to say?
May the odds be ever in your favour

Greenhouse

Joyce Ma

I cuddled into my mother's arms. We were enjoying the full moon at late night. Mother slowly patted my arm while she was watching the final few minutes of her favourite show, 'Celebrating Mid-Autumn Festival with Hong Kong', which most Chinese families would swarm inside the living room and stay together all night. In the old days, little brother Joe and I used to jostle each other for the seat next to my mother. Father would fall asleep next to us on the couch, snoring softly, chest heaving up and down in a steady beat. But this scene has gone for three years. Occasional shouts were heard from outside the window. Shouts of joy and laughter. It was Mid-Autumn festival after all. The television host spoke softer and softer, and the picture grew dull and blurry. The surrounding dimmed, mother sighed. And my heavy eyelids finally covered my eyes as mother started to move and carried me, walking slowly towards her bed.

On a sunny day, mother was preparing breakfast at the bar of our open kitchen. The news report from the radio was so loud that woke me up. 'An old drunk male wanderer was found abandoned and unconscious in a trash pile outside Chai Wan MTR station. He has been keeping silent for two days. The police have involved the

social service in search for the man's family. But given the unconscious state of the man, the social service predicted that it would be hard to locate his family in short time with little information. The social service spokesperson asks the public to provide information that can help this poor man.' My heart shivered for a moment, 'Would he be *him*?'

The wind blew relentlessly over the sea, causing the water to stir up foot high waves across the beach. A lone skinny canine stood and watched as the waves battered against the rock fortifications and up the deserted beach. It blinked and lowered its head against the wind, and the sand carried by the gust. It turned and continued its walk down the pavement away from the beach, sniffing around in search of something. Something that may be familiar. Something that might lead it back home. On top of a dark hill, a fierce array of barking began as the canine neared it.

I peered through the protective arms of my father as a car zipped by and honked, causing the pedestrians to pause and stare. Father then murmured about 'drivers', 'reckless', and something I did not understand. We continued to walk cross the road towards the shopping mall just across our neighbourhood in Central. People were swarming around us, some talking on their phones, some waiting to cross the even busier roads and some just walking quickly towards their destinations. Father held my hands firmly

while he walked beside me, keeping an eye out for anything that might cross our path. He pulled me closer as a trolley bounced by 4 feet away, loaded with heavy boxes that were bursting at the edges. A sweaty man pushed the trolley up the rather steep slope, bare-chested and squinting in the heat. I held my cold drink to my body, grateful for the chill and the protection I had.

Ten Teens Arrested for Triad Activity ‘A group of 10 teenagers aged between 12 and 22 were arrested in Tin Shui Wai this evening. They were said to be triad members of a local gang.....’ My mother shook her head with a small sigh, eyes still locked on the television screen. But her eyes seem unfocused and was clearly not listening to the next piece of news, which was about America politics. She came out of her daze and blinked. Looking over to where I was doing my homework and smiling at my confused look.

The sky rumbled and flashed. Fat droplets of rain poured down from the grey sky. Pedestrians ran for shelter. Windows closed, umbrellas opened. Life moved on. The heavy rain cast a thick veil over everything, isolating people and buildings. Those who were fortunate enough to be indoors, stayed where they were, looking up into the sky and wondering what to do. Day turned into night in few seconds and it was a different world of water and peacefulness around the city. It was good to be protected.

I jumped down the tree and ran towards my mother, who was holding up a bottle of water and a towel for me. Her brows slightly pressed against each other. Her mouth was pressed into a thin line. She was not relaxed at all. The tree I jumped down from was a fallen tree with part of its trunk raising about two feet off the floor. I climbed on it and jumped down. Something that was enough to worry my parents greatly. I usually got an earful after such 'bold' acts, but today was my birthday, so I got some slack. My mother still had that disapproving look when I ran up to her, though I saw more worry than anger in that pair of beautiful brown eyes. To be honest, I was a bit scared myself, jumping off a tree was not something I usually did. Now that I had made my point that I was no coward, I shall leave my next expedition to a few years later.

Young Swimmer Missing 'A boy was reported dead after being swept away while swimming at Tai O beach during typhoon signal number three. The 17 year old boy was reported to have been swept away by a particularly high wave' I slopped around in the tub and picked up my rubber submarine. I made it sank into the bottom of our white patterned bath tub, visioning its grant expedition through the soapy water. Mother sat next to me on a short stool, reading a novel 'Life of Pi' by Yann Martel. It was a read recommended by our cousin, calling it a light read that is fun and inspiring. She was very focused, only looking up occasionally

to check on me. Just as well, I was having immense fun with my submarines and battle ships. Water was my friend. It entertained me since I was born. Though I haven't been allowed to swim in the sea yet, I'm sure I'll enjoy that. The radio continued to hum away, talking about things both my mother and I were not interested in. 'The police sent out a search crew and diving crew to try and find the missing child.'

I ran. Hard. My mother was way in front of me, tears trickling down her cheek as she ran from the taxi stand towards the hospital entrance. The automatic doors slid open slowly to both sides, pausing my mother momentarily in her sprint. She glanced back and made sure I was following and quickly went to the information desk to ask for the two dearest men in our lives. The nurse flipped through the patient log book and pointed us towards the emergency room down the hall. We walked quickly but did not run, patients, doctors and nurses filled the hallway, each to their own destination. Our father came into sight, seated next to an operation room almost at the end of the hallway. Head in his hands. He looked up as we were approaching, his eyes bloodshot. He smelt of alcohol. Before we can say anything, the operation room's signal light went off, meaning that the operation is done. A doctor slowly pushed open the doors and came out. We prepared for the worst. And the worst did happen.

Drunk driver takes the life of a seven year-old 'A seven year-old boy was killed in a car accident three hours ago in Shatin. The father of the child was driving his son to meet their family for mid-autumn dinner...the boy suffered severe bone fracture and brain trauma. The boy was announced deceased after three hours of operation. The father tested positive for alcohol. The authority says they will press charges after further investigation....'

The moon stood high, round and white. With stars dotting the dark night sky. Stars that are from millions of light years ago. Light travels fast, but not fast enough. The stars we see now might be the light or reflected light from a star long gone, their image just reaching us now millions of light years after. Their images stay long after their physical selves perish. And tonight, the image of my brother Joe shines as bright as ever. Like the stars, lingering in my mind long after he went six feet under.

My mother held my hand as we stood. Silent. I was not feeling well today, but I insisted on coming. My hands were sweating and sweat ran down my forehead. My feet felt light and my whole body seemed to be pulsing with heat. My mother let go of my hand and patted my back, helping me brush away a few stray hair, pasted to my forehead by the sweat. It was an important day. We were in front of a marble wall. The wall lined with black and white photos, people of the past. Each of them seemed to be looking at me no matter how I moved, how I dodged. But we were

here for one photo only. The short hair boy with a wide smile, thick brows with a chubby cheek. His smile seems too bright and lively for a place so dull and depressing. He was young. Younger than the occupants of the ash columbariums beside him. Too young to be here, too young to leave. My mother bent down and inserted the last incense, its thin trail of smoke curling upwards. It was a place we visited each year. To remind ourselves of the beloved boy we lost. And to remind ourselves that he is watching and we must make him proud.

Shelter is sought by so many and yet is so scarce. Some live their lives in protection while others fight for their survival. Many do not know how dangerous the world is, but we all eventually learn the truth. Only when we get to understand and appreciate what we have, can we truly live our lives to the full.

The Summerless End

Summer in its final week,
So were you – in the kind of
Beds where moans bespeak
The oracle churchyard cough.

Your lips, once rosier than mine,
Now bleeding colours of red wine.
Your skin, once silkier than mum's,
Not glowing as the day comes.

Next to your bed we all stood,
Promising we'd all be good.
Grandma, grandma, do you hear:
Worry not, worry not, we are here.

The clock hit twelve and you left –
Death acquired you like a theft.
The machine beeped endlessly,
Summer's gone officially.

Where're you when we celebrate

Your eighty-second birthday?
Are you behind heaven's gates
Giving us warmth through sunray?

I put your pictures in my dorm,
So I see you when there's a storm.
Look at me in the mirror –
Your beauty's half possessor.

You then were living with me,
Now you are living in me.
Though you are gone forever,
We have never been closer.

*Dedicated to Yung Si-Heung,
my grandma, who passed away in Summer 2011*

Tiananmen Square

flag rises slowly

solemnly anthem is played

thieves stealing wallets

The Couple

Charlene Chan

Erica

She stays in the spotlight.

She lets people know her by the way she presents herself.

She looks chic and boyish.

We had a short walk after dinner, like we always did.

‘You want ice cream?’ I asked. I loved chocolate ice cream so much. And I really wanted to treat Cheryl to a scoop. I remembered her favourite one was Summer Berries, but sadly, it was a seasonal special.

‘Nah, I’m good,’ Cheryl said.

I seldom treat people, except for my parents and my elder brother, so I was a bit upset. But she was probably tired after a long day, or maybe she was full. I got myself Belgian Chocolate, and we left the shop.

It was actually closer for her to walk to the MTR, but she followed me to the train station. It was the same way I took to go back to my design studio at PolyU, where I planned to work for a while longer before going home tonight. If only my group mates were not there, I could actually show her around. I had planned to do so two years ago, but there was never a good time.

‘Since when did you not like ice cream?’ I asked randomly. We were too quiet.

‘Nah, I’m just full,’ she said. She looked tired. Or maybe she was bored. She didn’t say much during the dinner, although she kept smiling and seemed interested at what I was saying. I was never a witty person, so I didn’t know what to say. I was very good at conveying messages in abstract paintings, but never in talking. And she was the witty one who knew how to play with words.

It reminded me of a little gift I made her some years ago. Since Form 4, I found my passion in art and design, so I frequently stayed after school for extra lessons with my favourite art teacher. She also loved to stay behind to watch Hitchcock and talk about Virginia Woolf with her literature classmates. One day, we coincidentally had an idea of making each other a gift. It was actually a sketch practice, but I drew her face and gave it to her. In return, I got her practice piece of a poem named ‘Dear Friend’, but to me it was a love poem.

‘It’s a nice restaurant,’ I said ‘The soup was very good.’

‘Glad that you liked it,’ she said.

‘How did you find out about this restaurant?’ I asked.

‘My friend brought me here last year,’ she said.

‘Friend?’ I asked, ‘A guy or a girl?’ I remembered she told me about a friend whom she fell in love with last year. Her face wrote love when she mentioned his name. She was struggling if she should tell him, but there was never a good timing before she

left for Stockholm. After she came back, I asked her about him again, but she said there was never a person, and that I had probably mixed it up with someone else's friend because I was too busy. But I was sure I didn't. I thought about it over and over again during the months she was away. I couldn't get that sweet smile of hers off my mind. I kept rehearsing how to bring the topic up the night before we met up again for dinner.

Stories about our friends were never good topics to touch on, especially for those we loved hanging out alone with. I heard that she was quite close with guys since she entered university, and there were a few handsome ones around. I couldn't help being sceptical when she told me about their fun afternoon in Oxford during their two week trip to England, the day at Universal Studio Singapore celebrating a guy's birthday with his parents, and that she travelled alone with another guy in Prague. Why did she become so close with guys all of a sudden? Why did she turn so sunshiny whenever she talked about her friends? Why did she let her hair grow long and pretend she was a common girl next door?

'A girl,' she said.

I decided not to ask further. It seemed she didn't want to touch on that topic anymore. I didn't know if it was really a girl or actually a guy who brought her here. But even if it was a guy, it might not be the same person. And I actually didn't want her to feel that I was too curious about her friends or I was too gossipy. So I stopped asking questions.

It started raining. And it suddenly got heavier. We didn't have an umbrella so we rushed to the shelter. There should be an umbrella at my studio. When I reached the shelter, I turned around, and saw her way behind, walking slowly. I didn't know she was left behind. I thought we were running together.

'Why didn't you wait for me?' she asked, softly.

'You walked too slowly,' I said. I made up that answer without thinking before I said it. And it sounded like I was blaming her. 'Anyway, I'll get you an umbrella and take you to the trains,' I said.

Cheryl

She stays in the shadows.

She doesn't show her orientation unless she speaks of it.

She looks nothing different from a girl next door.

We left Häagen-Dazs and continued walking.

The road was dark. I couldn't see the path clearly. But Erica knew the way. We were walking towards her design studio at PolyU, the place she spent most of her time at university, the place she worked so hard that she became the best design student in her class, the place where she let nobody in.

'Since when you don't like ice cream?' Erica asked, looking randomly at the bar across the street.

I hesitated. I liked iced cream, but I didn't eat it because I

was on diet. And I had been avoiding ice cream for more than a year.

‘Nah, I’m just full,’ I said. I didn’t explain why I wanted to lose some weight. Because I didn’t want to say that it had been over a year since we last had a nice chat with each other.

We linked arms. I actually forced it. I seldom linked arms with anyone except her, but she probably wouldn’t know. I had a feeling that she thought I was a very touchy person who linked arms with all my friends. She never seemed like she wanted to, but she didn’t refuse either. Same as the many dinner dates we had after we left secondary school. She never refused. She asked for them. She invited me. And I kept telling myself we were only catching up with each other.

‘It’s a nice restaurant,’ she said. ‘The soup was very good.’

‘Glad that you liked it,’ I smiled. During the dinner, I forced myself to put on a big smile on my face, which was actually quite tiring. I didn’t show that I was bored, although there was so much dead air throughout the conversation. It was even more difficult than forcing myself to stay awake in the boring class on robots Thursday mornings. I had to keep brainstorming new topics to talk about, which was exhausting, especially for people who hadn’t talked to each other for a year.

So I took a rest. The muscles near my lips were stiff and too tired for me to keep smiling. And we weren’t looking at each other anyway. It reminded me that we always looked at random

things around when we walked and talked in the past.

The conversation turned dead again. There were some topics that I planned to talk about before the dinner, but I couldn't remember any of them. My mind was blank, and the only thing I remembered was her trip to California last Christmas, where she visited a friend. I was alone in Stockholm when I surfed Facebook and saw the photos that girl uploaded. They seemed very close. They were very sweet. They looked like a couple. I wanted to ask her more about the trip, but I gave up. I didn't want to annoy her.

'How did you find out about this restaurant?' she asked.

'My friend brought me here last year,' I said.

'Friend?' she asked, 'A guy or a girl?'

It was a guy, a close friend of mine at university. We were so close that people thought we were together, or would be together some day. But we weren't. We both noticed something different between us, but in the end I decided to wait for Erica. Gladly, after several months, he found his true love. And he introduced us a few weeks later.

'A girl,' I lied. Because he was another person I tried to avoid mentioning. Let it just stay with me as a silly story of unrequited love.

It started raining. We didn't have an umbrella. She suddenly walked faster and let go my arm. I was left behind. She walked faster and faster, and the distance between us grew farther and farther. I slowed down. I gave up chasing. She turned around once,

and saw me walking slowly, but she didn't stop running. I put on the hood of my sky blue jacket and let the rain wet my bangs. I instantly felt defeated.

When I reached the shelter, she was there waiting for me.

'Why didn't you wait for me?' It was the first time I had the courage to challenge her, though I doubted if it was courage, or just sudden impulse. I always relied on intuition to make decisions, and sudden impulse to put ideas into action. And I did it once again.

'You walked too slowly,' she said. 'Anyway, I'll get you an umbrella and take you to the trains. Follow me.'

We turned left and entered an old building. It was the less visited side of the PolyU campus that I was not familiar with, just like the Creative Media Centre of CityU where outsiders had no idea where it was. We pushed through a few white wooden doors connecting fire escape corridors and backstairs. I thought we were taking short cuts to the train station, until we reached a glass door, with several silver words on the wall beside it:

School of Design.

Why?

We stopped in front of a room. The room was blue. It looked like those huge aquariums at Ocean Park. The neon blue LED lights penetrated through the grey roll up curtains that covered up the glass walls. I peeped through the thin gap between two curtains and saw a group of friends staring at a laptop

monitor curiously. I heard some loud and heavy beats from the amplifier at the corner of the room.

‘My studio,’ she said.

‘Oh, is it,’ I uttered. I had no idea what to say. I could have put on a big smile and thanked her for bringing me to her studio, or at least looked very amazed and excited. But my mind went completely blank since the moment we pushed open the glass door and stepped into the Design building.

A girl walked towards us. Her black tidy fringe flowed as she moved, and revealed the layer of shimmering white blonde hair underneath. The silver bracelet with a dangling hot pink charm slid to her forearm as she waved at Erica.

‘We got any umbrellas?’ Erica asked. The girl slightly shook her head, and entered the studio.

Oh right, we’re here for the umbrella.

‘No problem, we can take the covered walkway on the other side,’ Erica said. ‘This way.’

And I followed her to the trains.

Dream to me

Jess Wong Chui Lam

Signal from the control tower lights up the Heathrow sky. An endless canvas stretches across the navy blue sky, smeared with shades of orange, purple and burgundy. As I fasten my seatbelt, the light fades away.

So does London.

Will I ever miss this place? A place that has been in my dream for a decade. Just two weeks ago, I decided to live the dream. It was a hasty decision, but I needed to get away. London is not what I have imagined. Not at all. I feel like Snow White being kissed awake by a dwarf instead of Prince Charming.

The engines groan. Gravity fails. I close my eyes.

Since I had breathed in my first breath of London air, I haven't been able to sleep well. I stayed in a budget youth hostel on Belgrave Road. An area crowded with nothing but rows and rows of identical cream three-storey Victorian buildings. It took me an hour to spot my hostel. As I dragged my luggage up to my room on the second floor, the creak of the wooden staircase echoed. After unpacking, I ran down the stairs to purchase the Wi-Fi. It cost £5 pounds a day. £5 pounds I didn't know if I wanted to spend.

My mind was conflicted. I felt obliged to call my boyfriend,

Ed, on his college applications. But that was the same reason I was in London.

We were of the same age. I was in the second year of my university study and him last year in his community college. To sub-degree students, June was the time for university offers. Bit by bit, students' hopes and dreams would be strangled by anxiousness and fear unless the magical offer letter was received. After having a dozen of interviews in the spring, we thought June would be a time for celebration. However, reality was never empathetic. With a 3.5 GPA, he should have already received offers from universities. Not HKU, but at least Lingnan. I couldn't stop wondering. What if he was not so stubborn? What if he wouldn't settle for programs or schools he didn't want? He knew what he wanted. So did I. For him to get into any university. In late June, we should be lying on Silvermine Bay soaking the sun in. Not worrying about college applications and pretending not to worry.

His anxiousness must be killing him. I needed to get to him. But the possible absence of good news pushed me away. It took me thirty minutes to open Skype on my iPod. The optimistic sky blue screen encouraged me to log in. I crossed my fingers and typed in my details. My breath shortened as the grey waiting icon turned.

We didn't recognise your Skype Name and password. Please try again.

I tapped on the small virtual keyboard like crazy with every

possible combination of user name. It didn't work. My breath slowed down. My shoulders relaxed. Have I really forgotten? I rested my head on the flat pillow covered by my Chip 'n' Dale towel. Is my brain punishing me for leaving Ed alone in the real world? Guilt filled my nerves.

'Sorry love, can't go online tonite :(I 4got my username. So sorry, sweetie :)' My heart pounded as I buried my relief with sweet words and emoticons.

'Don't be silly, babe. I'm fine. Trust me ;)' he wrote. I trusted him. Whenever we talked about his future, he would laugh without meeting my eyes, *'I'll start workin' if no school takes me, no biggie.'* His laughter was as lifeless as cough. I couldn't laugh. The vulnerability in his voice was a torture. I knew it mattered. To him, to me, to us. I was pressed not to contradict because I wanted to believe.

'I'm soooooo sorry. I'll try again b4 I leave,' I wondered if he could tell what was on my mind. Psychology was his passion. He wanted to be a counsellor. *'It's fascinating to hear people's problems and help them see things,'* he used to beam on the subject. The more interviews he attended, the quicker the glow diminished.

'Nevermind, I'll find someone 2 talk 2. Gotta go now, ttyl :)' he typed. Counsellors were like Superman to me. They helped the world. Who could help them? *Someone?* I was that *someone*. Then I bailed.

'I luv u, babe:-'* he wrote. That hurt. I didn't know what to reply. Repeating those sacred words would convince no one,

replying something else would convince him of my selfishness. I put my iPod away.

Staring at my roommates' sleeping bodies, I was glad the money went to waste. I didn't have to act optimistic. I could rest in my dream.

The round top window beside my rusty red steel bunk bed stretched from the floor to the popcorn textured ceiling. With the drapes detached from their rail, I was included in the outside world. Lights from the chandeliers in a four star hotel across the street lit up my room. The dusty blue carpet in my room was occupied by my roommates' shiny luggage cases and their shadows. Unlike me, each of them was opened as if they had nothing to hide. Drugstore cosmetics, fake Ferragamo ballet flats and dirty underwear scattered on the floor. Without me noticing, my mind gravitated towards them. My head felt lighter, my eyelids heavier, I lost my senses to the darkness.

Every morning at nine, the weak sunrays made their way from the naked window into my loosely closed eyes. Although it was summer, the sun refused to do its job. I hunted it down from Belgrave Road to Abingdon Street but in vain. It buried itself under layers of grey and white cloud. I did not cave.

I followed it onto Hungerford Bridge. The strong wind occupied my body. My ears could hear nothing but its roar. My eyes could see nothing but a static red dot from far away. It was too difficult. I forced myself to forget about the sun. Forget how

much I liked it. Forget how nice it was. Forget how lonely it might be. Like Ed. I walked away.

As I walked, the dot changed. Slowly and graciously, it turned. A triangular shape extended from its curve. Red dissolved into ivory, gold, coral, navy and pink. Like a black hole, it sucked me in.

Before long, I stood in front of a carousel. Each horse had different colours with different decorations. I picked an ivory one with a tiffany blue tiara, pale pink seat and golden tail. The music started. I held on tight to the rod which gold and silver stripes intertwined. The blood red platform with a light orange star in the centre span slowly.

My horse rose and fell with the beat of the merry jingle. As the world twirled before my eyes, reality was whirled away. I looked out at the crowd that filled Jubilee Garden. Their laughter was heard but their faces weren't seen. High school kids seized the opportunity to have fun before September. New parents took their babies out for the first time. Old couples reminisced how the place used to be.

Without me noticing, the horse became my unicorn. With me on its back, it carried me to my castle. A castle that didn't exist in reality. A castle no one heard of. A castle I didn't know I wanted. That's ok. I would know when I arrived. Along the way, each of my breath was soaked with the indulgent smell of fluffy cotton candy. Everything was dreamy and light-hearted.

The music stopped.

My unicorn became a boring heartless tin horse. Holding on to my faded dream, I remained on its back. The horse's cold lifeless skin froze my fantasy. I turned around to look for the smiles I saw. Gone. High school kids fought over where to go next. Parents yelled at toddlers for wanting one more ice cream cone. Old couples overwhelmed by sorrow of the lost youth.

I continued my journey down the Southbank. People in dark clothes brushed past each other without stopping. Street artists from East Europe and Africa waved, yelled and danced. No one stopped. Sickly sweet liquorice and irritating tobacco replaced the moisture in the air. I could barely breathe.

'*Come on,*' a six-foot tall, holed Swiss cheese-like figure waved at me. Our eyes met. It was Spongebob. My childhood hero. I couldn't help but smile.

'*Come on, take a photo with me. You know you want it,*' it jumped with joy.

The four-year-old inside me took over. She ran to it with full speed. Spongebob opened its arms and let her in. Amidst the noise and the cold, she was carefree for the first time in weeks. The camera flashed. The photo captured her brightest smile throughout the trip.

'*Thank you so much,*' her arms were half-opened, when Spongebob grabbed her left wrist.

'*One pound, please,*' the deep and coarse voice strangled the

four-year-old me.

My hero was a middle-aged man with East European accent.

I looked closely at him. His silver beard was visible despite the heavy makeup. His bloodshot eyes and sullen face resembled that of Count Dracula's. As he gripped tighter, his wrinkled and tensed cheek muscle forced his mouth to spread wider. The hot pink blush and pale foundation cracked. His face was fractured.

'One pound, please,' he repeated loudly. The strong vodka smell in his breath choked me. I searched for the one pound in my jeans pocket and handed him without looking at him again.

What happened to the dreamy England in my fantasy? The happy and content little kingdom that used to rule the world. The birthplace of Roald Dahl, Peter Rabbit and Alice. The place whose beauty should be beyond my imagination. Faintest soft blue sky stretched without being contaminated by clouds. Smell of buttery scones and earl grey lingered in every corner of narrow cobblestone streets. Well-mannered and elegant people who spoke like Mr Darcy and Elizabeth.

I try to bury the thoughts by listening to Lenka. It doesn't work. Linkin Park, Eminem, Michael Bublé, Diana Krall. None of them work. In frustration, I let my eyes stay opened in the dark cabin.

After eight hours of insomnia, my plane lands. I push the heavy trolley out of the departure gate. Dozens of people stand in

the hall. Some with cardboards, some with flowers. A young man stands among them. He has nothing but a pair of empty hands. He leans towards the silver bar. Every five seconds, he checks his watch with the gigantic clock on the wall. His leg fidgets. His head turns. He carefully checks his phone. Not a word from his girl who fled.

He lifts his head and looks my way. His warm gaze takes gravity away. As light as feather, I float above the spotless marble floor. I am in my castle. Grey, bright and gigantic. Everything around me sparkles. The dew on the white lilies in a little girl's hands. The warm tears of happy reunion on lovers' faces. My once heavy trolley turns into the lightest broom. I hold on tight and accelerate. Like a good witch no one heard of, I fly towards Ed. He catches me. His arms wrap tightly around me. I can no longer escape. In his arms, I let the fresh laundry smell of his shaving gel drown me. Gently, it guides me back to my reality. A reality I call my dream.

Fish Tank

Phoebe Cheung Yun Chui

I was in a small room. The walls were white. The ceiling was white. Everything visible to me was white. Spotless. Flawless. Uncontaminated. There was no door, but a window with bars. The window was small, too small for me to crawl in or climb out. The sunlight was the only thing that could sneak in through the window. The beam attempted to cut the bar with its radiance. But it was in vain.

I had no idea how I got in there.

A wooden table was the only furniture in the entire room, sitting right in the middle. It was painted white as well. A pungent smell of the paint struck me, almost making me sick. The surface of the table was roughly polished. I saw thorns on the wooden surface. It reminded me of a porcupine. On the table, there was a fish tank. It was not the fancy type of fish tank. No artificial seaweed. No fake coral. No colourful pebbles. Just a streamline fish tank made of glass.

A small goldfish was swimming in the tank. The size of it was smaller than a baby finger of an adult. It had a slim and long body, with a short tail. Its scale was glittering under the sunshine from the window. The golden orange colour of the fish popped out against the white backdrop. I felt happy for the fish. At least it

could remain as golden orange, escaping the fate of being painted white. Later I Googled it. It turned out to be a *Common Goldfish*. Being common was one of its characteristics. What came as a surprise was that it could have a lifespan up to twenty-five years or more, which is much longer than other ‘uncommon’ goldfish.

There was no any other living creature in the room. Not even a fly.

I just watched the goldfish swimming in the tank. Its tail danced like floating air along the water current. It swam in the tank spirally, as if it was chasing its own tail, endlessly. The fish was the sole focus of my attention. I had no idea of how long I had been staring it. Ten minutes? Twenty? Then I got dizzy from concentrating too long.

This was how one of those weird dreams I used to have ended. One of those that I could still remember.

I always wondered if I was the fish. Because every time I woke up after the dream, I found myself soaking wet on my bed. It was just that my room was painted black by darkness, rather than white. And it was too early for the sunlight to attempt to creep in.

I got the chance to live my dream in a beach in Pattaya, Thailand. If I could survive the dream, I might as well survive sea walking.

Still, part of my body told me I should not do it. My palms sweated profusely. Despite the boiling sand my bare feet

grew cold. What if the pressure took away my breath? What if the current ate me alive? What if I was not killed by the apocalypse, but by the sea? All these unsettling thoughts kept popping up restlessly, like greedy flies obsessing with a corpse. You shook them off for one second, and then they came back to haunt you again the next second.

At the meantime, my body was walking slowly towards a boat. A half-naked man was waving at me – my coach. He was sturdy and his skin was dark as chocolate. I could tell that even I saw him from a distance.

‘Hello, so you are going to be my lucky girl today, huh?’ he said with a smile, as well as a bit of Thai accent. I noticed that every time he smiled, there were wrinkles around the corner of his eyes. It made him look wiser.

‘Yes, I am,’ that was the best line I could think of. My mind was blank. I tried to fake a smile back.

‘Alright, alright. Come on, get on the boat,’ he said.

I was glad that my cold reply did not murder the smile on his face.

Eventually I managed to actually set foot on the boat.

It took us around fifteen minutes to get to the destination, where my coach and I were going to do the sea walking. We took the time to get to know each other. Or, to be precise, he took the time to get to know me. His name was Boon, born and bred in Pattaya. He had been coaching tourists under the sea for nine years

already. And he was going to keep doing it until he was too old for it. ‘You know, the tiny little fish is your friend. The small, small prawn is your friend. You treat them nice. They treat you nice. You understand me?’ That was exactly what he said. I did not really understand what he meant back then. But I did know he almost succeeded to take away my nerves in those fifteen minutes.

In that short period of time, he also taught me some hand signals to be used under the water. For example, if you waved your hand, it meant you were not fine. And if you pointed upward with your index finger, it meant that you wanted to get back to the surface. The hand signals were the only communication tool in the sea.

Fifteen minutes were gone without me noticing. I saw a bigger ship in the middle of the sea. Boon yelled loudly towards that ship. And he helped me get on it. Different kinds of equipment were scattered on the floor. Plastic shoes, oxygen cans, goggles. But none of them I was going to use. Boon greeted his colleagues who were already on the ship. Then he jumped into the water without second thought.

‘You ready?’ Boon said.

‘Yes. I guess,’ I said.

‘Just relax. The little fish is your friend. I am your friend too.’ His voice was comforting. He waited patiently. He drifted on the water like a piece of wood. The only piece of wood in my sight.

I took a deep breath and followed Boon into the water. He stretched out his arms to me. The muscle of his arm was so firm, yet his palms were soft, thick and big, with tremendous strength.

‘The water is not too cold, huh?’ Boom said.

I nodded my head with a smile as a reply.

Afterwards he put a helmet above my head. It looked similar to those worn by astronauts, which supplied oxygen and kept me alive in the water. I could not hear a thing then, except the sound of pumping oxygen and my own breath. It shut down my sense of hearing, shut me out from the land. The helmet was heavy. I could not lift or move my shoulders as the helmet rested on them. The next moment I found the other parts of my body had become stiff. They functioned out of the command of my brain. I exerted myself to pretend that I was not nervous at all. The water current was the best camouflage of my tremble. My sweat mingled with the seawater.

I climbed along the ladder after Boon. It led to the bottom of the sea. I could hardly see the bottom though the water was crystal clear. I thought I did it quite well. I even remembered all the gestures taught by Boon, without making a single mistake. The weight on my shoulders was like stones. It dragged me down, urged my steps. I felt the immense pressure whenever I made a seemingly trivial movement. I forgot to count how many steps I took. Ten? Fifteen? I could not care less about the number.

The pain. The unfamiliarity. The smothering.

I panicked.

I pressed my nose with my numbing fingers, hoping the air would escape from the ears as I breathed. Once. Twice. And one more time. I kept trying until I could smell blood inside my nose. It did not work. Just right before I was about to be squeezed into a raisin by the pressure, my feet managed to touch the ground of the sea. The tingle brought by the coarse gravel distracted me from the pain.

Boon showed me around as if the sea was his home. I followed his step like a pet of his. We walked like the slow motion in movies. Every time I lifted up my foot I felt like my legs were tied with a giant flat tier. Losing the balance in the sea was the last thing you wanted. It took triple effort to get up on your feet. So I was vigilant. I did not want to fall prey to violent current. He pointed at several coral reefs, as if it was his newest collection of art pieces. They all had contrasting colour scheme. Blue versus orange. Red versus green. Yellow versus purple. So Andy Warhol.

But the coach chose to stop next to a dead coral. It was grey in colour. He signalled me to wait and turned his back against me. I didn't dare move or touch around. Boon's art pieces could have been very fragile. A while later, he was facing me again. That was the first time I saw his face so closely. He was smiling to me like an innocent kid. His black, short and straight hair was moving in the water. The scene reminded me of a sea urchin. Then he signalled me to put my hands together like a bowl. He put a tiny

coral fish into my hands. It was golden orange. Its body was slim. Its delicate tail was swinging in the water. I tried to keep it inside my palms as long as I could. I had never been so close to another living creature. A soul was trapped in my palms. I felt it swimming inside the bowl. The skin of the fish felt so smooth as it hit my palms. Its tail brushed my skin. It left a kiss on it. Its beauty and fragility tempted me to peek at it. I gingerly opened up the crack. But then it slipped away through the gap. My eyes tried to catch up with its swift movement. I watched it swim away until it was consumed by the blueness of the sea. Boon was there with me for the whole time. I looked at the empty bowl. Then I turned to look at Boon. We exchanged a glance. It was time for us to go.

I pointed towards the water surface.

Boon led me to the ladder. This time I went before him. The more steps I took, the closer I was to the gleaming water surface, and the more weightless I felt. When I set foot on the ship, I was wringing wet. Water was dripping from my clothes and hair. I licked my lips and tasted the saltiness. Boon wrapped a towel around my body without saying a word.

At that night in the hotel, I lay on the bed, trying to reminisce the senses brought by the fish. Its silkiness. Its golden orange. Its liveliness. It was once in my hands, till it was not. I closed my eyes. I replayed and relived the moment until the exhaustion got the better of me. Then I had that dream again. Still the same room.

The same table. The same fish tank. Only the fish was not found again.

Hell

Mehul Kumar

‘Click-click!’ dying echoes of plastic hitting against the metal made him emotional. This wasn’t the first time, but it was different, a more soothing effect, with the cool breeze caressing his hair. He liked the fire, slowly burning its way through the paper and the burley tobacco, as he inhaled. He had promised himself to quit, but this was the last one. The fire still raged, far off, still visible, burning everything he once loved, wiping out all the beautiful memories, his friends, his family, his home. He liked heights, the feeling of being at the top, so he loved this place, but he didn’t know how he got here. He wasn’t worried, not in the least. If anything, he was relieved, of a huge burden. It was the right thing to do, or so he told himself.

‘Click-click!’

It was a clear autumn morning, with a few distant cars buzzing on and off. ‘When you are in college you have to enjoy such things,’ she told him long ago, and so he was out on a stroll. He was energised, despite having been awake for the last forty hours.

‘It is finally done, I guess I’ll be pretty famous now,’ he said as he lit his first cigarette in a few months. He had been busy, working hard to finish his masterpiece. Even if he was a genius, it

was a pretty difficult thing to accomplish, almost a miracle. He couldn't imagine how she must have felt when he told her that she would live. Yu was dying, since everyone they consulted told them so, 'there is no cure for it.'

She was all he had, ever since he came to Hong Kong, a year ago, when his family died in a terrorist attack. 'If only I had been there, for celebrating my own graduation, then I wouldn't be alone,' he told himself, as he packed his stuff to leave Mumbai. He trashed everything, burnt everything that could fit in a municipal container, and left, to be alone, to repent for his negligence, his cold attitude, his life.

'You seem new here, let me show you around.' Her cheerful smile made his resolved heart melt in a second. She cared, and made his life bearable. He decided to be mediocre, never to achieve anything, never to celebrate, and she supported him, knowing that it was a waste. He could have attended a med school anywhere in the world, but he holed himself in this unknown school, just to fulfil his promise to his mom. He smoked a lot, more after he started living here, even more in restricted places, looking for trouble, looking for punishments, but she got him out every single time.

Sometimes, he was afraid that he didn't deserve this happiness, but that bright smile on the pale face lit by the moonlight, or the flowing hair in warm summer breeze made it all seem trivial. And on one of those days, she didn't show up. She

had fainted in her classroom and had to be taken for a hospital visit, the first of a seemingly endless succession of treatments. That is when he decided to fight and take back what belonged to him.

No one had seen him work even half as hard. It was difficult to convince the Dean, but he caved in after seeing his record, to let him work on a pet project. No one had the slightest idea how to splice a DNA, not unexpected though, but he pulled through days, and weeks, and months, and years, persevered in face of constant failure, and finally managed to find a way to systematically correct each and every cell in her body. His research was paying for itself, since each accepted paper and every intelligent visitor brought in more money. This also provided him the freedom to explore new horizons, with the huge arsenal of instruments he got his hands on. He tested on all kind of animals, observed them, but she was to be his first human experiment. And finally, when there was not even the slightest hope of an accepted treatment, he reluctantly agreed to treat her. After checking in everything – emergency kit, food, water – he sealed himself shut for experimenting on the one person he needed the most. Everything went smoothly, to his surprise, against all his experiences so far. She woke up right away; her pale ruffled face glowed with the same smile he loved. ‘Too perfect!’ he thought, as he chatted to her about everything he did in last thirty six hours, and a planned holiday in Macau, and how he burnt the rug while

cooking and replaced it without her knowing, and some other stuff.

He went out after what felt like eternity, went out in the world again. 'Let's celebrate,' she said, 'Campus 7-11 have a nice strawberry cheesecake.' While at it, he also bought some nice cigarettes for a personal celebration of his triumph over God. During research, he had come across an amazing way to remodel bodies. It was simple actually; tremendously increase the regeneration rate of cells, and controlling slowly mutating cells to create superior features. Knowing the limits of human body, he had no other choice to make Yu live as long as him after the treatment. It was his gift for everything she meant to him. No one knew about this since human modification was still prohibited. 'Now, they will know and they will see,' he thought. He had already decided that once this was over, he would hand over the technology to international defence organizations, to carry out a vendetta on terrorism on his behalf. And he was smart enough to know that this will put him in a whole different league of scientists. 'Dreams do come true,' he mumbled, watching the sunrise. She was obviously sleeping and it was a couple of hours until her next check-up, so he went back to their home, filled with piles of trash by then. He tried to remember the last time he cleaned, but failed and then, dozed off even before entering the bedroom, crashing onto the floor, right through the cobwebs, making a huge cloud of dust which eventually settled right back on

him.

It was a huge ballroom, filled with creatures right out of a dystopian science fiction. And there was a familiar music playing as he danced with Yu. Her eyes were slightly bigger now, well so were some other parts, but they made her all the more remarkable. A huge military man came up to him, shook his hand as he praised him. ‘Thud, thud, thud...’ he saw huge red splatters on the colonel’s suit. He turned to look as Yu poured out a semi-automatic rifle on the only human in the party. ‘What did I do wrong....?’ as he died; and woke up to find the hospital emergency staff and his neighbours in his face. They rushed him out, as he came to realise that they had broken in. Seeing his phone filled with messages removed the last doubts that the disaster has actually happened. He had missed the check-up, and the three after that. The nurse told him Yu was psychotic, and chomped off a patients thumb. Few others got hurt while isolating her from general population, and there was huge uproar in the facility. He knew he should have kept her in observation for a few more hours, but it wasn’t really the time for hindsight.

‘Click-click!’ Smoking in a hospital was prohibited, but who cares after being comatose for a few years. He distinctly remembered the moment when he drove past the countryside and just a few unrelated noises after that. He didn’t even care about other patients in the ward. He was brought here just a few hours ago, after waking up suddenly.

‘Don’t do that,’ she said, ‘it hurts.’

‘I’ll be out of here in jiffy, missy, been here for a damn long time. You take care.’ The lighter fell from his hand and through the shooting pain, it took him a moment to realise that it was his thumb stuck in her teeth. Next moment he was on a cart going to another operating theatre, like *déjà vu*. The hospital took the responsibility to reattach his thumb but he still wanted to yield a shovel on everything around him. He thought it was anger and it was justified, but it kept growing, until he began to drool and jumped on the first surgeon on his side, and soon, it was a bloodbath. There was this unbearable heat in the throat, water didn’t even register in his brain. He craved for human flesh, and blood. He had to be shot 5 times before he stopped moving. The whole place was quarantined after all the living victims developed similar symptoms.

He cried out, ‘Zombies!’ as he tried to explain to him why he cannot be allowed to enter. He was brought here by emergency staff, but now none of them had access to the building. All the authorities had been notified, staff and patients on unaffected floors were evacuated to the top floors, where they waited for the rescue chopper. Surprisingly, there was no media, even after an hour. He demanded to be taken to the lab where Yu was, the huge crowd waited outside the hospital, and more crowd brought in by the commotion. He, and the other locked out doctors, were instructed to cover it up as a routine fumigation. He was surprised

that even after few hours of such a huge commotion, there was no sign of media vultures anywhere. Suddenly, an ambulance came through, and a tall man grabbed him as soon as the doors opened.

‘You have created monsters.’ He didn’t look like a doctor, but he was a professional. He explained, ‘The security guy told us the whole story from the beginning, and so we secured your sweetheart, the CCTV tapes and one of those dead zombies.’

‘All of them are dead, you understand, their bodies broke down under intense pressure created by your technology, everyone except your superhuman girlfriend. I give her a few hours,’ said the doctor as they looked at her hideous and deteriorating body through the fibre glass. She no longer recognised him, didn’t answer even to his desperate cries, or the banging on the glass.

It was a matter of national security, a huge advance in bio warfare. All evidence was wiped off clean, no loose ends could be allowed. He was one big link, but losing such a huge asset was unaffordable, especially since he had not published a single detail about the process, but just the cure for the disease. He was given a choice either to join them, or to spend life in an isolated dark cell for human experimentation and mass murder. But it was the least of his concerns right now. He agreed to all their demands, brought in his research, taught the process to the new co-workers with unreal clarity and vigour. He was tired, but he completed all the formalities, and followed all the orders to such an extent, that he was allowed to go out of the facility on the day he came in. He was

dropped at his house, but he didn't go in. He walked, letting his intuition carry him for the last time. The hospital was still burning, no loose ends, as he walked off the highest building, into the dark, silent pavement.

The way to live your life

Consider if you should treasure that in your life

Acquaintances –

It's what you have to find

Happiness –

Don't bother to care about it

That's easy to lose

Status –

is important for daily life.

Being positive

Is just a waste of time

Be lazy

Is what you should do

To hug the ones that you love

Is something that you shouldn't try

Smoking –

That's the way to live your life.

What? It doesn't make sense

Read it again from the bottom

to the top!

How to cook a porterhouse

Wear a mask

Cover your mouth and nose

Wear goggles

Protect your eyes

Put on gloves

War begins

Our enemy, the porterhouse

Alive

Butter,

One only?

More

Can cover some bad smell

Black pepper

Use gun powder?

No,

The whole grenade.

Well-prepared

Control tower, is the pan ready?

Yes, Sir

Add oil, not too much

Ready for the death sentence.

Turn it another side

Wait

Sir, until when?

Till can't see its red face

Good?

Not well done.

A Lemming

Chan Ho Long James

'...lemmings have long been misunderstood as rodents that commit mass suicide every now and then because of their habit to move in a large group. Hundreds are found dead trying to cross a river that was surely too challenging for them when with their group, leading some to believe them lacking in individuality. The misconception is so famous that it has been portrayed in movies and cartoons. In the English language, the mentioning of lemmings is related to individuals' lack of decisiveness and trend to follow others. In truth...' Attenborough's commentary blared on from the unwatched BBC documentary show on my television. My eyelids were weighted like lead and my head drooped, my ears continuing to let in Attenborough's voice even though I wasn't making sense of it at all. Laying back onto my chair my hand unconsciously still gripping my mouse, fingers poised, ready to click, but nothing moves, my body settles like stone apart from my head.

A tone beeped indicating a message on my chat box. I jumped. There in the small chat box on my screen, Elza wrote, *I'll c u tmr, sleep la, goodnite*. Relief, the small clock on my screen's lower right corner indicated that it was almost four in the morning. Finally I could sleep. My limbs protested for the sudden large movement, standing up, after hours on reclining on my chair. Stumbling either from drowsiness or lack of movements over a

prolonged time, I went out of my room to switch off the television that kept the house supplied with human voice. Sleep followed the silence.

My boots thumping was the first true noise that broke that silence as I walked to the MTR station. It was packed with morning commuters, all hurrying along, I with them all. But upon landing at the platform, the train has yet to arrive, so I followed the crowd to disperse towards the lesser-occupied doors. Once upon the train my eyelids closed on me again, wishing to continue the pitiful little sleep I had last night. But that was denied from me as the packed train swayed, forcing me to stay conscious to stand firmly. So I took out my book and started reading. And I read and read and read and read and I was at my destination. Through two interchanges including the winding Quarry Bay station corridors, my eyes stayed on my book, never looking up to see where I was going, simply following my fellow urbanite in front of me. Every time I pass through the gates reaching for my Octopus Card I ask myself, *Is this the right station? How did I get here? What time is it?* It's as if I were unconscious that whole time being, just a drop amongst the flow of morning commuters. This drop followed the current for the whole morning until it was time for it to split, so it could merge with another drop.

With brows raised, 'You look awfully tired,' Elza told me over her bowl of noodles.

'Mmmm.' I muffled a yawn.

‘I can see that you’ve just finished lunch,’ she nodded towards the empty plate in front of me without a speck of rice or morsel of food left, ‘but isn’t it a bit too quick for you to get sleepy? I haven’t even finished mine. Don’t people start doing that after an hour or so? By the way, why are we actually eating in the canteen instead of somewhere else?’ she accused me with her brows creased this time, nodding her head with every question.

‘Er...since both of us had no idea, so this seemed the obvious choice,’ my eyes narrowed, ‘and, they also say that the fuller you get, the more tired you are,’ I slurred out, half out of my tiredness, half acknowledging to myself that this was not the case.

‘Then why did you empty your plate and so quickly?’ She dipped her head and peered at me so it exposed her eyes which normally are veiled behind her black thick framed glasses, now also steamed up.

‘Cause I was hungry?’ I said, can’t being more rhetorical about it as I ended the statement biting my lips.

‘No breakfast?’ she continued to ask with her mouth full of noodles.

‘Hard to when you’re late for a nine o’clock lecture because of sleeping till the last minute,’ I said.

‘Wait. What? You had nine o’clock today? Then why did you stayed up so late last night?’ Elza asked.

‘Cause I was chatting with people?’ I said, I was in fact in some sense blaming her. ‘You all only become available at those

times.’

With her eyes wide, ‘You could’ve told me.’

‘Nah, would’ve stayed up anyway,’ I lied.

Familiar as we may sound, I have only known Elza for a couple of weeks, since we were put into the same project group. This was our first lunch together, in the almost empty university canteen. It was too late for lunch and too early for tea, so we basically had the whole area to ourselves. Elza isn’t exactly the right fit for beautiful, though she is cute in her vibrant ways: extravagant emotions and actions, the way she care-freely speaks her mind and the way her slightly big head bobs with those over the shoulder length hair sweeping one side to another; a bit like an animation figure. Like many girls of her age, you’ll find her easy going most of the time, except when she’s deprived of sleep. I once made the mistake of waking her up in the morning to ask her questions and the wave of curses that I received for the rest of the day was comparable to Valkyrie’s fury, in full fledge.

‘Hey, I’m going to clubbing Friday night, interested to join?’ her question and those eyes of her brought me back to earth, waiting for her to finish her lunch, or tea.

‘Clubbing eh? Who’ll be going? And what *do* you do other than drink?’ I asked with sincerity. I was in my second university year but I’m obviously not acting like one. That’s why I decided to start following what other university students did and Elza seemed

a good start. An extrovert that seems to get along well with guys, I could tag along without herself or others mistaking me for other intentions.

‘People from school, mostly, drink and dance. What more do you need? Just follow what everyone does and you’ll have fun,’ she finished with a smile.

‘Okay, yeah, count me in,’ I said with half-hearted enthusiasm, my eyes straying to the windows. Fun isn’t exactly the word I would use to describe my last experience of clubbing, more like headache or dazzling but I wasn’t putting too much thought on that now. The day has dimmed a lot since the morning with clouds tumbling all over the sky. According to the observatory, there might be a need to raise the typhoon signal to no. 8 in the afternoon.

‘Let’s go, got a tutorial in five minutes,’ Elza said in a rush as she started to pack up.

We parted as she headed for class and I somewhere to work on my essay. I followed the crowd around the usual route to look for an empty seat and plug for me and my laptop. It was some time till I could find a seat, even for one, since the crowd in front of me kept on taking the seats first. I wasn’t sure why I followed them but my mind was so full of my ideas that I would have stopped if I wasn’t following them, as I did when the last of them found themselves seats. My seat was next to a window that gave me a good view of the troubled sky and I started typing.

Looking out, I keep having urges to add in Zeus or Thor or the other ancient gods into my essay and soon, I found myself looking at a sentence like this ‘...*didn't have to wait long before Zeus borrowed another Poseidon's trident and threw it across the clouds that they've draped over the sky*’. It sounded grand, but it was so random and stood off from the rest of the story. Furthermore, the others in the class were adding in romantic elements into their story so this just seemed so deviant. I scraped the whole piece and started over again.

I was intoxicated by the soft thumping of my fingers on the padded keyboard when vibrations from my thigh interrupted me. A text from Elza, *No. 8 for sure tonight, wanna go for a movie?* I looked out of the window and indeed clues for the upcoming typhoon was everywhere, people rushing along, leaves turning in flocks with the speed, agility and unpredictability of fighter planes in a dogfight.

‘Sure, which, when n where?’ I replied.

‘Avengers, 7:45, Langham Place’ the replied came within a few seconds.

She sure did her research.

‘K, how meet?’ I typed, seeing that it was still not six and plenty of time left.

‘Lib front, quick, there already,’ again, in less than ten seconds.

I stuffed my things back into my bag and started at a quick walk, calling my mother to tell her I wasn't going back for dinner.

‘Mom...’ I started.

‘The typhoon is coming you know?’ she broke in.

‘Yeah...’ I answered.

‘Not coming back for dinner?’ she continued.

‘Yes...’ I answered again.

‘Movie?’ she asked. I stopped dead and held out my phone.

‘Yes, but...’ I successful blurted two words out.

‘What else is there to do when there is a typhoon. With girls?’ she asked, I was able to take a step before I stopped again.

‘What...’ back to a word as I lingered on it.

‘You wouldn’t be going out on a typhoon night with guys. Your elder brother? Yes. You? Impossible,’ my mother finished her sentencing. That was exactly why I didn’t think I was acting like a university student.

‘Fine,’ I admitted it in a sigh. It was the first time I finished my sentence in this conversation and the last.

‘Watch your time and stick with the MTR, don’t use your umbrella, or either you or it will be gone,’ and with that she hung up, obviously cross because I wasn’t coming home in this weather. My mother’s power to predict events puts her properly into the league of witches and gypsies, but she herself isn’t that hard to predict either.

Elza was leaning on the wall as I arrived at the front of the library, alone.

‘It’s just only us?’ I asked, looking around.

‘Yeah, Alex’s parents forbade her,’ Elza said as she headed for the exit in quick strides, people all around us were hurrying along, ‘and since it was the umpteenth time since she last obeyed them, she thought she’d better heed their words this time.’

‘Right, and why are we rushing?’ I eyed her back as I followed her quick pace in simple strides, our strides have a pretty big difference between them.

‘I’m hungry, I want to eat before the movie,’ she told me with a cocked eye. Was that a slight blush?

We went to eat, even though I wasn’t hungry, with all the others that had plans like ours. We watched the movie, I laughed when everyone laughed at scenes which I didn’t find particularly funny, didn’t laugh even when I thought it was funny but others struggled with the English to understand, since it all felt awkward if I didn’t follow so. I accompanied Elza home even though it wasn’t exactly in my way, since I believed it would have been what others have done in my shoes.

I got back home safe and dry as I followed all the others that were also returning home, taking the best route already chosen by those before us. As I waited in the lift, Attenborough’s voice came up in my head again... *there are also other sayings that claim otherwise, that it is out of the individual lemming’s self-interest to move as a group, since it is the safest way of traveling along their journey.*

July 27th

Fung Mei Yan Miranda

July 27, 2012

Don't panic, Mia Almazan. It's just a door. All you have to do is to knock on it. Easy.

Except it's not. I was standing in front of an unknown hut in an unknown forest and I was desperate to go home. But I couldn't. I had promised Ate Crescentia. I mustered up my courage, took a deep breath and tapped at the little white door. 'Tao po,' I said. 'Are you there, Mr Santos?'

The door opened and there stood an old man. He was pale and thin and he looked nothing like my grandparents. He stepped towards me and I could see the confusion in his eyes. 'Sino kayo?' he asked politely.

'Kumusta kayo, Mr Santos. Ako po si Mia. Mia Almazan,' I replied. 'Do you know Freddy Almora?'

'Fred? He used to be my neighbour when we were in Sarrat. But that was years ago,' he answered.

'Do you know where he is now?'

'Well, he left his place one day and I never saw him again. Heard he died in a car accident.'

What?

'Did you say he died in an accident?' I asked again.

‘That’s what I heard,’ he shrugged and stared off into the distance. ‘He was a nice guy, you know? Tender-hearted and compassionate. Pity he died so young.’ He turned his gaze towards me. ‘Why are you asking this?’ he raised his eyebrows. ‘And how do you know my name? Do I know you?’

‘He...he was...er ...my great uncle! He mentioned your name once when I was ... little.’ I swallowed feebly. ‘I’d better go.’

‘Why don’t you s—’

‘Thank you so much for your time Mr Santos.’ I cut him off before he could finish his sentence. ‘Paalam po.’

I ran away as quickly as I could, as if it was a crime to make a little lie. *I can’t do this anymore*, I thought to myself, *how many more times do I have to do this? I’m a terrible liar.*

‘You really are.’ A familiar voice interrupted me. I looked around and realised that Ate was next to me. She saw my face and laughed. ‘It’s easy to tell what you’re thinking. It’s written all over your face. How do you find Carlo Santos?’

‘Oh, he’s very kind. But Ate, he said something really strange. He said your—’

‘I know. I was there just now. But that’s not true. Fred is still alive.’ The smile had vanished from her face. ‘I know he’s not dead. Come on, Mia. I’ll show you the way home.’

Ate’s full name was Crescentia Divero Almora. She was born in 1926, to a poor family in Sarrat. Just like me and most of the Filipino women, she had long black hair, brown eyes and olive

skin tone. But she was a little bit different. She was a spirit. A very beautiful spirit.

‘Can you tell me how you died?’ I asked her as she led me out of the forest.

‘I don’t really know.’ She frowned. ‘I went to the market for some pork that afternoon and I was attacked on the way. They were robbers, I think.’

‘Oh. And you were—’

‘Twenty three when I died.’ The smile appeared on her face again. ‘I look young, don’t I?’

July 27, 1949

‘Cres, I’m here!’

‘Coming!’ I hurried to my front door and opened it. ‘You’re early!’

‘You’ve got a letter, my friend!’ Maria said excitedly.

‘Who from?’ I asked.

‘Pred.’ She grinned.

‘*Talaga?*’ I snatched the letter from her hands and started reading it. ‘Dearest Cres, by the time you’re reading this I’m already on my way back home. I’ll be there at six if the ship leaves on time. Buy us some pork. Let’s celebrate. Haven’t seen you for months. Miss you. Love, Fred.’

‘So he’s really coming back from Manila?’ Maria asked. ‘For good?’

‘I think so.’ I smiled.

‘Aw. That’s so sweet. Now I’m envious. Carlo said he won’t be back till next year.’ She sighed. ‘Do you think he is up to something?’

‘Don’t be silly, Maria.’ I squeezed her hands. ‘There’s no way he’s gonna cheat on you.’

‘You’re right,’ she giggled. ‘Silly me.’

Maria and I spent the whole morning doing house chores. She already knew Fred was coming back the night before and she insisted to come help me with the cleaning.

‘You done?’ I asked as I hung the clothes on the line.

‘Yup.’ She walked towards me and handed me some pegs. ‘Your house doesn’t need too much cleaning actually. It’s already *bery* clean.’

‘Thanks so much for helping me.’ I realised we hadn’t had our lunch yet. ‘Are you hungry? I’ll go make you a sandwich.’

‘No, I’m alright.’ Maria replied. ‘I still have errands to run so I’d better get going. Say hi to Pred por me, okay?’

‘Will do.’

I lay down on my bed and looked up at the ceiling. ‘What should I cook for dinner?’ I asked myself. ‘Dinengdeng? Pinakbet? No. Fred hates eggplants. Adobo? And what should I do with the pork?’ I sat up and looked over at the clock. 2pm. I didn’t have much time left. The market would be closed in an hour. So I got up, picked up my purse and hurried out.

As I was walking down the pathway to the market, I saw a woman leaning against the old lamppost. She looked very ill. ‘Help me,’ she breathed, stretching her hands to me. ‘Help.’

I ran to her and asked how she was feeling. Then all of a sudden I was hit in the head and I fell to the ground. My vision started fading out to black.

‘What should we do with her?’ I could barely make out what the woman was saying.

‘What should we do now?’

‘Take everything from her.’ said a deep man’s voice. ‘Including that little thing on her neck.’

‘But she is –’

‘Be quick! Do you want to be caught?’

And then there was only silence.

July 27, 1950

It was five in the morning and I was awakened by the two birds chirping outside my window. I sat up, rubbed my eyes and watched them sing for a while. Who said birds were terrible singers? They were quite good actually. The singing suddenly stopped and I realised the birds had already gone. Perfect. I was on my own again. I lie back down on my bed and shut my eyes.

The ship left on time and I arrived at the port at six on the dot. I looked around for Crescentia but she was nowhere to be seen. *Perhaps she’s got the time wrong.* I thought. But Crescentia would

never get anything wrong. She had a strong memory. She could remember everything. I hopped on a jeepney and handed the driver a 10-peso note.

‘Is that you, Fred?’ the driver asked. I looked up and realised it was Pete, our old neighbour.

‘*Hoy* Pete.’ I didn’t like the way he looked at me. Why was he so stressed?

‘Go to the hospital now.’ he said. ‘Your wife has been robbed and she —’

I got off the jeepney and dashed to the only hospital in town. ‘Please don’t do this to me,’ I prayed while I was running. ‘Please don’t do this to *us*.’

When I arrived at the hospital, I noticed Maria was there too. She was sitting quietly in the corner. I went to her and I saw her tear-streaked face. *Don’t do this to me, Father.*

‘Pred,’ she paused and sobbed, ‘Cres is dead.’

I dropped my suitcase on the floor.

I got out of bed and decided to go out for a walk. I went down the worn-out pathway nearby and I realised I was in the glade. I sat on the ground and looked up at the sky. ‘Beautiful,’ I said to myself.

‘Hiya buddy.’ I felt a pat on my shoulder. It was Carlo. ‘Maria told me you’re leaving this afternoon?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I am.’

‘But why?’

'I don't want to stay here anymore. This place reminds me of Cres.'

'I'm so sorry, Fred'

'Nah it's alright.' I got up and smiled at him. 'I'll come visit you and Maria on Christmas, okay?'

'Sure.'

I needed a new life. I needed to go to somewhere where nobody knew me. I needed a new name.

'May I have your name, Sir?' asked the lady as I queued to board the ship.

'Almazan,' I replied. 'Fernando Almazan.'

Leung Ying Yu, Zoe

The Waiting

I should have held your hand tightly with caution
That way you would never have lost your bearing
I am waiting for you at the reception

The harmony of music and clamour numbed sensation
In this boisterous place you began your roaming
I should have held your hand tightly with caution

A whiff of cotton candy filled you with elation
Its sugariness so intense that it was mesmerizing
I am waiting for you at the reception

The buttery crispness of popcorn stirred temptation
Your dimples blossomed as you started munching
I should have held your hand tightly with caution

The carousel of colours kept you in captivation
Lights were torn asunder while your eyes were misting
I am waiting for you at the reception

Your fingers escaped from mine in an abrupt fashion

Your absence agitated me and set my heart racing
I should have held your hand tightly with caution
I am waiting for you at the reception

In Love We Drown

Same bag,
Same path.
Same song,
Same laugh.

Fate?
Too romantic.
Coincidence?
Too often.

Illusion,
Dazzles in lover's eyes.
Foolishly drown,
In the sweetness for two.

Ambiguous,
Nothing happens,
But yet tastes better
Than anything could have happened.

Expectation,

Trying to perfect the shape of love.
Yet love,
Does not fit in any rationale.

Youthful Warriors

Lying under the burning sun
the golden land of sunflowers glistens.
Early summer, endless shine;
follow the golden warriors
and keep your head up to the high.

Bunches of youthful laughter I
hear, a long-lasting echo in my mind.
Lively teenage, endless laugh;
happiest among all ages,
the sole worry is those maths graphs.

Just few years older now I am,
vexation already makes my mind jammed.
Rigid system, endless fights;
why the future is still clouded
when I have strived with all my might?

Swaying gently in the warm air
the golden warriors look fresh and fair.
Resolute will, endless life;

they swing as if they were saying,
'Ease your knitted brows, feel alive.'

Shattered Symphony

Jess Wong Chui Lam

I am not a part of everyone.

It is a cold December afternoon in the first year of high school. Everyone begins to call each other friends. Not me. When someone invites ‘everyone’ to a party, they are not referring to me. Why would they? Short, quiet and insignificant. If people were to be represented by colours, the girls in my class would be cotton candy pink, and me dark brown like tree trunks, waiting not to be discovered.

‘Sophia, is that a wig?’ My classmates point at my hair. Their sharp and clear laughter fills the classroom. I pretend not to hear and pace to the door. I don't blame them. It's difficult for them to understand. They hang out with each other by the basketball court after school. I walk home with my shadow.

In my bedroom, little light enters a small window by my bed. The soft sunlight brings the black Yamaha in the corner out of darkness. It was my mother's. I still remember the day she gave it to me.

On my third birthday, I saw Mom remove the oxblood velvet piano cover for the first time. It was magical. Under the brazing summer sunlight, the sleek black piano shone like a black pearl. Mom smiled at the reflection of my astonished expression. I

gently touched it with my index finger. I did not want its beauty to be disrupted. Mom sat down in front of the piano and started playing Canon in D. Her fingers moved playfully and elegantly like ballet dancers. She was confident and gracious. I leaned my head on her shoulders, which smelt like baby powder and told her, 'I want to be like you.'

'Then you need to work hard,' she smiled and kissed my head.

I did. For twelve years. Every day, my piano practice starts at four, which gave me exactly ten minutes to rush home. Then, I would be physically and emotionally attached only to the piano for five hours. Nothing can change the routine but Mom. When I was younger, I was more defiant about the routine. But things changed on a Friday four years ago.

After having three exams at school, I could fall asleep walking. Still I got home by four and sat on the piano stool with my back perpendicular to the horizon. Every note made my eyelids heavier. I stabbed my tongue with my teeth, until it hurt. The pain slowly moved up my spine and set up a firework show in my brain. The moment the sense of pain exploded, my eyes opened. Though I managed to stay awake, my stomach howled. The longer I played, the louder it got.

'Mom, can I have a break?' I asked.

'How long have you been practicing?' she asked behind her Financial Times.

‘Two hours.’

‘Then you still have three more to go.’

‘But I’m starv...’ I was too tired to realise the cold finality in her voice. Before my sentence finished, she threw her newspapers to the floor. The loud noise made me play several notes wrong.

‘I don’t want any excuse,’ she said. The impatience and disgust in her voice muted my stomach and me. Her message was clear. Defiance was not an option.

Surrounded by my tidily organised piano trophies and Mom’s sheet music collections, the echo of my breath brings me back to reality. The clock strikes four. I should start my practice.

I sit down on the leather seat and see my hideous mop hair. The blunt bangs above my eyebrows separate my face in halves. The rest of the hair hangs a few inches above my shoulder. I look like a horrible Cleopatra impersonator without the beautiful jewellery. It is nobody’s fault but mine. If I had tied my hair up, Mom would not have complained about it.

After losing the regional piano competition in City Hall last Saturday, we strolled along the promenade to catch the 84X bus home. Just before we reached the pier, a mild sea breeze blew our way. The wind gently lifted my long black hair up. As my hair danced around, the cool winter air cleansed my mind. I wanted the short-lived sense of liberation to last. Mom wanted any sign of rebellion to be extinguished. Instead of the 84X bus, she hailed a

taxi. Throughout the thirty-minute ride, I didn't ask, Mom didn't tell. Only the news anchor in the radio spoke.

I stepped out of the taxi to find us standing at the entrance of a modern looking business building on Connaught Road. My right eyelid flickered. Something was not right.

The moment we exited the elevator, a tall handsome man greeted us. He has long brown curly hair held tidily by a black plastic headband and a black apron. The logo stitched on the pocket of his apron caught my eyes. A pair of white scissors.

'Welcome, Ms Li,' he smiled. His bright smile gave me shiver.

'Mom, I don't want a haircut,' I told her as she walked past the wall fountain at the entrance.

Mom pointed at the furthest red plastic barber chair by the full view windows. Immediately, the man led our way with high enthusiasm. I walked past the clean quiet aisle as slowly as I could. Along the way, there were two rows of large baroque frame mirrors. In front of each mirror seated a middle-aged lady in tidily ironed business suits. Their attention was attracted to nothing but the finance magazines in their hands. Occasionally, they would lift their heads. Just to give the hairdressers behind them orders. Not once did the hairdressers inquire or defy.

'Please, Mom. I promise I will tie my hair in a tight ponytail every day,' I grabbed Mom's arms. My croaked voice was drowned by the conversation between Mom and the man. She pointed at

the chair again.

The cold plastic chair adhered tightly to the skin on my thighs, not giving me a chance to escape. I looked into the mirror and saw Mom. She smiled confidently as she told the man what she wanted for my hair. Her intimidating confidence. He nodded and stomped on the oil pump. Like a prisoner waiting to be hanged, I held the hair around my neck close. He stopped smiling. My fingers were cruelly loosened. The silver scissors were up in the air. *Chop*. Mom nodded with satisfaction. More and more hair appeared on my burgundy robe. I looked out of the window. The busy streets overflowed with commuters. Very slowly, they brushed past each other to get to their own destination. A place where their desire and dream can be fulfilled. Totally unaware of what was happening on the other side of the window.

I did not cry. Amidst the loud noise of hairdryers and customers' chatters, I could hear her voice, 'it's for your own good.' I believed her.

But now, the reflection in the piano makes me sick. One after another, I pile crinkled music sheets of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony until it vanishes. Once I start playing, my mind is occupied. My feet stomp on the rusty brass pedal, making loud sounds like thunder to scare the keys. Then they bounce up and down, trying to catch up with my graceful fingers but in vain. Suddenly, a wind blows from the opened window.

On the wooden ground lay the scattered sheets, there is

nothing to protect me from my reflection. I see my hair. My lips trembles, my breath paces, my tears well up. I take a deep breath and resume playing. All I can hear is a lot of meaningless noise, as noisy as jets, as persistent as flies. The noise makes my stomach twisted and twirled, so I shut the top of the piano.

‘Keep playing,’ the girl trapped in the piano demands.

‘I can’t do this anymore.’

‘Why? You’ve been playing for so long,’ she smiles but her lips barely move. There is no light in her eyes but bloodshot. I wonder when she last smiled.

‘I am not happy,’ I stare straight into her eyes.

‘Even with all these trophies?’ she sneers.

‘I never want them,’ I slam my clenched fists on the piano.

‘I thought you want to be like Mom,’ her smile disappears.

‘I want to be me,’ my heart nearly jumps out of my rib case as I hear these words coming from no other than myself.

‘You are nothing without your mother,’ she grits her teeth. The vein across her nose pops viciously like a volcano waiting for an explosion.

‘*You* are nothing without her,’ I run to the bathroom and take a hair clipper out of the white cabinet. Hair falls onto the ivory sink. The robotic and repetitive sound of the razor is the best song I ever played. Light is glowing on my head. Golden, warm and lively. I turn on the shiny tap.

The Lady in Red

Ankit Girdhar

‘Even if you don’t believe me, for my sake please don’t go through this path,’ Raman pleaded with his friend Sharman.

‘Oh! You villagers and your superstitions. You know this is what is holding you guys back. Man has reached the moon but you still believe in these fairy tales,’ Sharman replied almost chuckling.

It had been a great evening. Sharman had come back to his village, Ramgarh, after almost twenty years and had been welcomed with a perfect homecoming. The panchayat¹ had arranged for a small function to honour Sharman who was the first person from their tiny village to become a police inspector in the nearby city, Hisar. He had left when he was fourteen years old with his maternal uncle to go to the city to get further education and now he had returned a man who had made his whole village proud.

After the function his childhood friends forced him to a late night movie at the only theatre in the whole village. Well, even calling that building a theatre would be like calling a bow and arrow an assault rifle. It was a mud house, which housed an almost vintage projector, donated by some rich city family and was still

¹ Village council (Hindi)

somehow miraculously functioning. As Sharman had expected, the movie was *Band Darna*, an old Hindi movie as no one in the village bothered to get a new print of the latest flicks. But even so, the gang had a great time watching the horror movie and munching on the samosas² and kachoris³ they had managed to smuggle out of the dinner party and drinking Santara, cheap local booze made from oranges.

By the time the movie finished, it was well beyond midnight. The friends said their goodbyes and decided to meet the next evening for a game of cards under the Peepal⁴ tree in the centre of the village. Sharman had quite a long ride home so he had brought his bike with him. As he started the bike, Raman came to him.

‘Hey, would you drop me at my farm. It is on your way,’ Raman requested.

‘Of course. Get on,’ Sharman said.

The full moon was shining brightly in the sky with a reddish hue. It was a rare phenomenon which was considered an evil omen by the villagers. But Sharman didn’t think twice about it as he was enjoying the breeze comb through his hair. Sharman shifted into the first gear as he brought the bike to a halt in front of the gate of Raman’s farm.

² Stuffed savoury pastries

³ A spicy snack

⁴ A sacred tree for Hindus

‘So, I guess it’s good night for now,’ Raman said, after he got off the bike.

‘I know. Seeing the village again after such a long time has made me so nostalgic. So many memories! Gulli Danda⁵, swimming in the pond, bunking school. Oh! I could go on and on,’ Sharman said.

‘I would love to chat longer but I’m so tired that I just want to sleep now. See you tomorrow, Raman.’

Sharman turned his bike into the small lane which was a short cut to his house. He was hoping that his sister had readied his bed because he was dead tired. He was about to go into the third gear as he heard a shout which sounded a lot like Sharman. He applied the brakes as hard as he could. The bike screeched to a halt.

He turned around and saw the silhouette of Raman running towards him. *He* didn’t know whether to be surprised or worried. *He* was about to get off the bike when Raman reached him and started speaking.

Raman was panting so hard that his speech was incorrigible. ‘What..... You..... Mad....Ghost.’

‘Breathe, yaar⁶, breathe,’ Sharman said.

After Raman had taken a couple of long breaths, his panting stopped and his breathing became smooth again.

⁵ Tip-cat

⁶ Buddy (Hindi)

‘So what possessed you that you ran like a mad man to stop me?’ Sharman asked.

‘You were going down the path through the graveyard,’ Raman said.

‘So...’ Sharman asked, looking questioningly at his childhood friend.

‘Don’t you know? That place is haunted. No has made it alive out of that place at night.’ Raman said increasing the volume of his tone.

‘What? Are you serious?’ Sharman asked, trying hard not to laugh out loud.

‘Do I look like a man who is kidding?’ Raman said, his face becoming a bright shade of red.

‘Calm down, *yaar*. There is nothing in this world as ghosts,’ Sharman said trying to reassure his superstitious friend.

‘Tell that to the villagers who were never heard from again after they took a short cut through that cursed place,’ Raman said.

Sharman realised that it would be useless to talk sense to his friend who was clearly quite scared. So he decided to humour him instead.

‘So whose ghost is it?’ he asked, trying to keep a straight face.

‘Do you remember the girl Lalli who used to play with us sometimes? She lived a few villages away,’ Raman asked.

‘No, I don’t think so. You know it’s been so long that...’

Sharman tried to explain but Raman cut him off.

‘Well, that’s not important. She was to be married to son of the landlord who lives near your house. But her father was unable to provide enough dowries for the wedding. So the parents of the groom along with the groom set fire to her on the very night of her marriage. She tried to run away but that made the fire even worse. She made it to this graveyard before she finally succumbed to her burns. People say that they can still hear her screams on some nights when it is really quiet.’

‘Oh my god! That’s horrible. Didn’t anyone file a police complaint against the family?’ Sharman asked.

‘No.’ Raman replied with his head hanging down with shame. ‘You know how it is. They were the richest family in the village. No one dared to speak up against them. But that didn’t matter. The whole family died within a matter of months. All natural reasons, they say. But I believe it was her spirit which was avenging her murder.’

‘Well, I feel sorry for the girl but I don’t believe in this ghost and spirits crap. It’s just a coincidence that all of them died in such a short period of time,’ Sharman said, still sure of his scientific education.

‘And what about the dozen villagers who have never been heard from again? And coincidentally, all were seen for the last time at this graveyard gate,’ Raman said.

‘Okay, you believe in what you want and leave me to my

beliefs,' Sharman said in an attempt to end the argument.

Raman was still not convinced but he didn't put up any more of a fight.

So after trying in vain to win his argument with Raman, Sharman started his bike and steered it through the old wrought iron gates of the graveyard. Suddenly, he felt a cold draft on his neck and he felt goose bumps rise all over his body. Despite his best efforts, his mind started replaying the scenes of the horror movie which he had considered completely stupid earlier.

'I am a police officer, for God's sake. I can't let childish fears overpower me. Just think of happy memories,' he murmured to himself.

He checked his watch. It was nearing 2pm. A smile formed on his lips. He had always been proud of his gold watch which his uncle had gifted him when he had passed the police training.

As he was turning his head to look ahead, he reflexively glanced in the rear view mirror and he froze. He felt his chest tighten and his body go almost limp. There was a figure in a red sari⁷ and the jewellery of a bride, half hidden by a tree not very far behind. But what scared Sharman to his very core was her face. Where there was supposed to be a beautiful female visage, there were scorched black remains of what once had been a face.

He blinked and the figure was gone. He felt beads of

⁷ Traditional Indian clothing for women

perspiration roll down his brow onto his glasses fogging his vision and at the same time felt chilled to his very last bone. He was having difficulty breathing normally.

‘That was just my imagination and the magic of the strong alcohol. That couldn’t have been real,’ he said out aloud, trying in vain to reassure himself. He ran his hand over the bulge of his trousers which housed his service revolver. The feel of cold metal made him feel a little stronger.

‘Oh! Not now,’ He said almost shivering as his bike’s headlight started flickering erratically.

‘I should have gotten that repaired. Now I’m screwed,’ he thought to himself trying not to surrender to his fears.

With a last flicker the light went out completely. It got pitch dark and Sharman just panicked. He accelerated the bike in an attempt to end this torturous journey but unfortunately peace was not to be his. Just as he had begun to relax a little, there in front of him hardly twenty yard away was his worst fear personified. In the bright mist there stood the figure which he had thought was conjured from his imagination, clear as the day.

She was in even worse condition than he had first seen her. There was no patch of skin on her body. The red sari and gold ornaments made a scary contrast against her almost black body parts. But the feature that was sure to send a chill down your spine was her eyes filled with pure evil and hatred. And that was not all: when she spoke smoke rose from her mouth and her voice was so

loud and distorted that it could make the bravest of men shiver.

'Tu apni mant ke paas aaya hai. Ab tujhe koi nahi bacha sakta.

(You have walked to your own death. Now, no one can save you.)'

That's what she kept repeating over and over again. By now Sharman had lost all thought. His body no longer responded to his rational brain. It was as if half his body was already dead. Suddenly, she vanished. He closed his eyes in relief.

THUD!!

His bike collided with a big rock lying on the road and the bike flipped over sending him flying towards the thick mist which had suddenly appeared out of nowhere. With great courage, he opened his eyes and found himself face to face with what he thought was the devil himself. He started breathing through his mouth to fight the strong stench of burnt flesh which now surrounded him. He tugged at his pocket trying to get a grip on his revolver.

With a tight grip on the gun, he shot at the figure in red. Even though the bullets went straight through the mist, but the woman started screaming in the shrillest voice Sharman had ever heard. After the third bullet, the red figure vanished but the screams continued.

Sharman stopped shooting. Everything was dead silent. He looked around and the red mist was nowhere to be seen. He kissed his revolver in gratitude.

'Oh, God! Thank you. Thank you,' he said closing his eyes

in a silent prayer.

Just as he thought that he would live through the night, he smelt the burning flesh right behind him. Fearing the worst and chanting a silent prayer, he turned around. A chill ran down his spine as he found himself staring into her eyes which were now bright red.

'Tera ant nazdeek hai (Your end is near),' she screamed. Saying that, she started cackling in the scariest manner possible as she raised her hand as if to strangle him.

Regaining his senses, Sharman started stepping backwards. He had lost any courage to turn and run. Suddenly, the figure dissipated into a mist blowing towards Sharman. Trying to run back faster, he stumbled on a rock falling backwards. His fall was broken by a tombstone, and the last thing he felt was the warmth of his blood before everything went black.

Urban Magnet

Goodbye my villagers
I am going to a city for answers

Friendly faces disappear
Only poker faces here
Skyscrapers tear the endless sky
They block my eyes

Hard asphalt replaces muddy warm path
I can't even leave my footprints
I'm sprinting
To an illusory blueprint

I am a migrant
Regarded as a cornball
I cheat myself with insignificant achievement
When nightfall
Fall asleep with a little alcohol

Easily absorbed
Hard to separate

A city is a magnet
Outsiders attracted
Insiders hated

The Kids in Kwai Chung Estate

Queenie Li

1996

The sun was angry like any other summer days in Kwai Chung Estate, the public estate that had been built since my grandparents had been in their thirties.

Mum was at the mah-jong place that sounded like thunder, spending her afternoon gaining and losing money as she chatted with her friends, mostly about gossips. She went there on Saturdays, the only free time she had when she did not have to work as my dad's 'accountant' of his self-owned truck company consisting himself, my mum and a driver. Mum went to the mah-jong place for fun, like how I played with my toys for fun, she said. Some adults went there for a living, though. They had this obnoxious odour on their body that smelt like a mixture of sweat, newspaper and cigarette. I was happy that it was not my mum who spent all her weeks there, because then there would be me alone at home when my dad was at work. Although that means no one would scream his or her lungs out when supervising me doing my homework, it would still be quite scary to be alone at home.

Having just finished my Primary 2 homework that I spent a painful afternoon to work on with my home tutor, I ran towards the wet market near my flat. The five dollar coin mum gave me for

sweets was secured tightly in my palm. Germs must be dancing on my palm as my sweat made the rusty coin smell disgusting. The wet market was made of a combination of wood and steel frames. I ran pass the kind, middle age lady's dumpling shop right outside the wet market. As always, she was there with her glasses blurry with the steam from her pot of dumplings and noodles. 'Good afternoon, Yee Yee,' I yelled as I ran.

'Good morning, Ah Mui,' she replied. Ah Mui, meaning 'little sister', was how older people called me. We were not in any way related, but calling each other aunties and little sisters was how close we were with almost everyone in our neighbourhood. The steam that I had just passed by smelt like dumpling. I gulped to stop myself from drooling. *I have got some more important tasks at hand*, I thought.

The floor of the market was particularly wet near the fish store so I had to hop over the water, making sure the dirty water didn't splash onto my feet and slippers. Then, there I was outside the toyshop. I was panting, trying to breathe. In the middle of the toy mountain, I found it - the toy recorder - a prize mum promised to give me if I had full marks for all dictations. A recorder just like the Primary 4 students played in class – except it was pink, with flower, grass and butterfly patterns engraved beautifully on its plastic surface. I gulped, imagining having it with me and playing the recorder all day long. I left the shop and went to the candy store. Bought some gummy worms that I had always loved. Then I

dashed to the playground to meet my friend Wan Hong Kin.

Kin was a boy who lived three blocks away from my home in the estate. Although he was only a year younger than I was, he was one head shorter than me. His skin was darker because he always got to play outside while I had to stay at home for homework and revisions. He was the boy who never had to worry about homework. The boy who could swing to the sky and make a loop or two when he played the swing. The boy whose parents were always in the mah-jong place, unlike my mum who went there only on Saturdays. Kin's mum, whom I called Wan Yee Yee, had curly and messy hair, was a chain-smoker. Kin's father, Wan, was always there in the mah-jong place too, except for the few months - he got into jail because he molested someone. That was what my mum once told my dad after playing her weekly mah-jong.

Mum once made a bad joke about me and Kin that we looked like a princess and a servant, but Kin was too carefree to be angry about it.

In most Saturdays, Kin was the crucial part of the day because we had several 'important missions' to finish within one day when we could play outside together. He would compete with me swinging higher than each other. We would zoom through the smelly and wet alleys between the old residential buildings with our bicycles and play Cops and Robbers and break cases in our detective games. He was my childhood best friend who taught me how to climb onto the top of the steel frames in the playground

that I feebly but successfully climbed on.

‘Just don’t look at the ground when you climb up!’ Kin yelled, already at the peak of the steel frames.

I looked up at where Kin was. Step by step I climbed. First slowly and shaky, then swiftly and sturdy. Suddenly I turned into a spider. There, I climbed up onto the top level of the dangerous steel frames. I look down at the Kwai Chung Estate. People were small and I was tall.

‘We did it!’ I secured myself by holding the steel frames tight, ‘Now, who’s the thief?’

‘At our 9 o’clock position, over,’ Kin talked to his shoulders and pointed to the entrance of the wet market, ‘now we will have to be patient.’

‘Roger that,’ I replied as I leaned against the top of the steel frames. I looked at Kin’s eyes, wild open without even blinking, as if the whole city was under his supervision. The sun was grilling us but we refused to budge. His sweat went into his eyes. He wiped it quickly with his shirt and promptly resumed his supervision work. I did the same.

‘Now, let’s catch some bad guys,’ Kin said, as if he had spotted something. He climbed down to the ground with two seconds and got onto his bike. I climbed down trying to catch up as his bicycle sped.

‘Where are we going?’ I yelled as I rang the bell on my bicycle.

Kin's bicycle stopped outside the wet market. So did mine. The steel doorframes outside the wet market were out of shape. They were all rusty and pointy. One could easily get hurt running around the wet market if he or she has not been running here for years, like Kin and I did. Kin turned to me and signalled me to be quiet. I followed obediently.

There I saw, not too far away, the person Kin had been following – the girl who had small eyes, nose and lips. We called her Mouse Girl. We often saw her showing off expensive toys to her friends. She stole all of them. All of the toys she showed off.

'We are going to break this case,' whispered Kin.

I nodded as I followed him quietly. I tried not to step onto the water from the fish store, but it was impossible because we had to follow Mouse Girl in absolute silence. *This water is disgusting*, I thought. Kin's feet were filled with black, wet spots from the dirty water on the floor.

Kin had always wanted to be a policeman. That was why he kept 'practicing' his detective skills. His toys were all guns. All sorts of them. And he always carried around the one that could fire yellow plastic bullets. Those that can make you bruise for a whole week if you get shot.

I did not like guns that much. But I wanted to be a police, too, because I wanted to be with Kin all the time.

We went near the vegetable store and the fish store and hid behind an empty wooden box. Kin pulled out his plastic bullet gun

from his broken shorts. The Superman print on the shorts had faded almost completely. But he never threw that pair of shorts away. He wore them almost every day.

The shop owner, whom we called Uncle Toy, was looking for something at the stock, not looking at his toy mountain.

‘Um... I want the one up there!’ Mouse Girl told Uncle Toy.

Apparently Mouse Girl had asked him for something that needed some time to find - to distract him from looking at her. Her hand was already reaching the recorder – *my* recorder.

My blood pumped up and flooded into my head. *Not this one*, I thought, *don't steal this one*. I looked at the dumpling lady, trying to ask for her help. She was busy with her cooking and chatting with customers. The fish guy was listening to the radio, keeping track of the latest horseracing event. ‘Number 5. Number 5,’ he shouted. His veins almost popped out from his neck. The vegetable lady was taking a nap. Flies landed on her chest and legs. I hid behind Kin’s back, paralyzed with anger.

Kin did not even slightly move. He pulled the trigger. His gun aimed at Mouse Girl. When Mouse Girl was ready to run when her hand grasped the recorder, *bang!* Kin’s gun fired. A yellow plastic bullet landed on Mouse Girl’s thin arm.

‘Ahhhhss,’ screamed Mouse Girl, searching for the source of the bullet. She spotted Kin and me as she dropped the recorder on the floor. Uncle Toy saw her. She picked up the recorder

quickly and ran away.

‘What the hell are you doing?’ the Uncle Toy barked at the direction to which Mouse Girl ran.

Kin had already pushed away the wooden box and ran after Mouse Girl. Uncle Toy’s face turned into the colour of his toy fire trucks.

I took a short cut to the exit of the wet market. There she came – Mouse Girl – with the recorder. I grasped her small body as she struggled. Kin came from behind within a second and caught Mouse Girl and took her back to Uncle Toy’s shop.

Mouse Girl, who was in tears, had to apologise and promise never to steal anything again.

Uncle Toy gave each of us a set of toy cuff and gun as a reward. We brought the sets with us every Saturday.

2001

Kwai Chung Estate was too old for anyone to live in. Some of the buildings’ walls had started to fall off. The government arranged us to move to the newly built Kwai Chung Estate – only a five minute walk away from the old one. First rubbles, then dust. The fifteen buildings were demolished into a piece of wasteland as if God had made a bad move in a massive Jenga game.

The wet market with smelly fish, hot dumplings and the mountain of toys had been conveniently replaced by a Wellcome Supermarket in the CityLink-owned shopping mall. I wondered

where the dumpling lady went. Did she stay at home all day instead of making the world's most delicious dumplings? Did she forget about me, the kid who went to her shop almost every day after school?

The excitement of the new playground within it was not even close to the adventurous wet market and the steel frames of the playground in the old estate. It was nothing but a rubbery slide and some cylinder-shaped tubes for young kids to run in. Plus, bicycle riding was strictly prohibited in the new estate – Kin and I found it outrageous and at some point we stopped hanging out on Saturdays. I stayed at home for video games instead, and I assumed Kin did the same, too.

Since our move to the new Kwai Chung Estate, my mum did not have any mah-jong place to go to. So she started to spend her Saturdays looking at my homework and got herself busy pushing me into a secondary school she liked.

'I don't know why you can make such a mistake!' mum yelled at the top of her voice after scrutinising my pile of homework, 'Did you even look at what you write?'

I looked at the calendar, not believing Saturdays could be so horrible. *It used to be fun on Saturdays*, I thought, holding my Math exercise book, which was wrinkled after my mum grasped it with force and threw it onto the floor.

'Rubbish,' she was not referring to my homework.

One Saturday I went out to go to a tutorial centre for the

first time. A tall person walked pass me - it was Kin. Only he was not alone. He was with Mouse Girl. And a bunch of her friends. All of them were smoking.

2011

I was in suit and my first pair of high-heels. I was going to have a project presentation for an English Literature course at the university for the first time.

The lift arrived on the 20th floor, where I had lived for ten years. I stepped into the lift, making sure I walked sturdily in my new two and a half inch high-heels.

‘Hi,’ said a deep voice. I looked up to find Kin, who was a head taller than me now with the same tanned skin.

‘Oh hi!’ I responded. It came out sounding strangely over-exciting.

Although Kin lived just five floors above my flat, but I had not seen him for years since the last time I saw him with Mouse Girl.

In an awkward silence, I thought about what to say, being sure that he was also trying hard to think of topics to talk about. The trip from the twentieth floor to the ground floor suddenly seemed like a decade. I scratched my head, so did Kin. ‘Oh, how are you?’ I said something anyway. He replied in a tone like how we would talk when we were kids, only with his much deeper voice.

'I'm okay! I'm okay. Haha, but you must be better than I am,' he looked at the floor of the lift, acting happy by making something between a smile and a laugh. He looked at me and smiled, clearly embarrassed. I pretended not to see his tattoos on his arms.

'Haven't seen you for a long time.' I pressed the 'G/F' button unintentionally. He said something, but my brain was too busy imaging what had happened these years to Kin, with whom I once had no secret. I tried to remember since when did we stopped playing in the playground together, since when did we started our own lives without even letting each other know and since when did we start to keep our secrets to ourselves.

The lift was quiet. There we were on the Ground floor. The doors opened. I paused. I tried to look at him in his eyes. But he avoided my eyes.

I couldn't ask, but I wondered if what my mum said was true – that he had started stealing with Mouse Girl and did all sort of things that he hated as a child, that he started to take drugs and got caught, that the Cop on the bicycle had then become a prisoner - in a pair of police cuffs like the ones Uncle Toy gave us.

The silence was long before any of us walked out from the lift. I knew, at that time, that the question would better be left unanswered. He walked to the left exit of the building. I took the exit on the right, which was not my usual route.

The doors closed.

The Crash

Janice Lo

It was in the dead of night when I heard a loud crash downstairs. I was awoken immediately from my deep slumber. The intruder was trudging up the stairs making no effort to remain quiet.

There wasn't anything worth stealing in this house, except my MacBook, which was currently downstairs on the kitchen table. Almost everything was second-hand, I couldn't think of anything else worth taking.

As the intruder came closer, the second-floor carpet muffled the sound of his footfalls. My heart was racing and my palms were sweating. I looked around for anything I could use as a weapon of some sort, mentally cursing myself for throwing away the Trevor's baseball bat after he left me.

Not knowing what to do, I grabbed my phone to dial 911. It was precisely at that moment that my phone decided to *beep* loudly, indicating a dead battery. *Crap, now what?* I thought to myself as I scanned the room for my remaining options. I contemplated running over to my open window to scream for help, but in this neighbourhood, I doubted anyone would help me. After all, screaming and shouting were not uncommon here.

I quickly scanned my room, seeing the closet across my bed as my last option. My only hope was that the intruder would

take what he wanted and leave before he found me in the closet. The neighbourhood I lived in wasn't exactly safe, but I couldn't afford another place, with the baby coming and no Trevor by my side.

I heard a grunt – a familiar grunt, and the bed squeaked under the weight of the intruder. *Wait a minute*, I thought to myself, *what was he doing in my bed?* I peeked through the cracks to get a glimpse of the intruder. *No, no, no, no...it can't be! I must be dreaming*, I thought to myself as I rubbed the sleep away from my eyes. What I saw was not what I expected. Not in a million years. It was Trevor – my ex-boyfriend and the father of my unborn child. He was passed out drunk, lying on my bed on top of my ruffled sheets.

Slowly and quietly, I opened the door. I scanned the room for any hidden dangers lurking in the shadows as I inched my way towards him. I allowed myself to drink him in. The months apart had not changed him much except for a bit of stubble and some worry lines between his brows. *Nothing's the same anymore, I can't let him get to me*, I reminded myself as I placed my hand on my belly. The baby was growing bigger every day.

As I got closer, I caught the scent of cheap whiskey and smoke lingering in the air. *Ugh!* The smell made me nauseous and my dinner threatened to make its second appearance.

Wrapping my dressing gown tightly around my body, I lightly nudged him to see if he would wake.

No response. I shoved him a little harder.

‘Kate,’ he mumbled my name in his sleep. My heartbeat quickened again, this time for an entirely different reason.

Deciding it was best to wake him up before he slipped into an alcohol-induced coma in my bed, I shook his shoulder until he woke. ‘Trevor, wake up! What are you doing here?’ suddenly aware that my voice was thick with worry.

His eyes fluttered open, as he gazed up at me, slowly sitting up. He lifted his hands to gently cup my face. ‘Katie, is that really you?’

I ignored the heat and butterflies that I felt when his skin touched mine and kept what I hoped was a stern expression on my face. ‘What are you doing here?’ I asked again.

‘I miss you babe,’ he whispered, looking at me with his pleading, bloodshot eyes.

I miss you too, I thought. Tears welled up in my eyes as they threatened to betray my mask of indifference. I turned away from him and said, ‘it’s not your place anymore. *You* chose to leave me, to leave us.’

He grabbed my wrist, slowly pulling me towards him and wiped away a tear that had trickled down my cheek. ‘I know babe, I was wrong okay? I miss how it used to be. Can’t we go back to the way things were?’

I closed my eyes, willing away the tears. One second I was standing there, the next thing I knew, I was enveloped in his arms.

He made me feel so safe, like everything was right in the world, but I knew better.

He sensed my hesitation and his voice broke as he said, ‘I freaked out okay?’ he put his hand on my now bulging stomach and said ‘I love you. I want this. I want us to be a family.’

I can't do this again, I thought to myself, *when morning comes, he'd disappear again*. The last time he left, he shattered my heart into a million pieces. The only reason I was able to pull myself together and pick up the pieces was for our baby. *My baby*. I couldn't let him do that to us again.

I tore myself away from him and said, ‘Trev... don't.’

Shock and panic flickered across his face as he said, ‘Babe, no, wait.’

Without another word, I dashed downstairs. Carefully avoiding shards of broken glass, I reached for my car keys that, until earlier this evening, sat next to the vase – now lying broken, in a million pieces on the floor. *Just like my heart*, I thought to myself as I hopped into my car.

Driving always helped me clear my head. I let the tears flow freely down my face as I sped down the street. Losing Trevor was like losing my father all over again. My painful memories rushed back to me. He left us when I was five. My mum said that he couldn't handle the responsibilities of being a father anymore, and although she never said it out loud, I could always see the resentment in her eyes. It broke my family apart. *Trevor knew the*

impact my father had on me, I reminded myself, but he still left.

I had no idea where I was heading or how much time had passed. The sun was beginning to rise, and the street lamps had turned off. I was done crying, I needed to get back. I needed to talk to him.

Suddenly, a car came out of nowhere. I slammed my foot on the breaks but it was too late. I braced myself for the impact as the car was flipping over. I felt a moment of weightlessness as my life flashed before my eyes, not my past, but my future with Trevor and my baby. *Our baby.* It was in that moment that I knew, Trevor would never be anything like my father. It was stupid of me to run away.

I am lying in a hospital bed, holding our beautiful baby girl in my arms. She has her daddy's curly brown hair and my clear blue eyes.

I am sitting on a park bench, resting against Trevor's shoulder. Our little angel calls to me, 'Mommy, mommy, come push me on the swing!'

I am looking through the sea of magnificent black robes and tasselled caps – our baby girl's graduation. Looking over at Trevor, I will never forget the way his smile crinkled his eyes and his look of pride and unconditional love.

I will never forget.

Then, my world came crashing down. An excruciating pain shot through my body, as though every bone had shattered, *but my*

heart was whole, I thought to myself.

A gasp of breath, then silence as the darkness took me in.

Sentiment

Weifan Chang

I. The Commuter

It was the usual day that I stepped onto the 5pm commuter that pulled into the station eight seconds late. I always took this train because it was right before the rush hour, and I hated the thought of being squeezed in with hundreds of others. It was unpleasant in every way imaginable, the ever-present fear and irritation that there might not be a seat for the half-hour journey across town, the incessant chatter, the constant battle for legroom, and along with the smell of people up close. That was why I always go before everyone else does.

The train compartment I now entered was cool and smelled fresh, with only a few people on board. It amused me to think that they were like me; the few wise ones who avoided the masses and that in a few minute's time, the now empty compartment would be filled to bursting. I thought of the only time I missed my early train and was horrified at the sight of people inside the next one, jam-packed into God-knows-what-kind-man-made-pan-cake that public transportation creates when cars are inadequate.

I sat down on the nearest seat I could find. The wide, spacious windows of the train carriage were unobstructed by people, and I enjoyed a panoramic side-view of the station. There

was a girl who sat across from me, and a few others who sat a ways down. Two cyclists with their bicycles waited at the end of the car, watching the tracks down the rear cab. I always chose the last car of a train, there was never an explanation for it, but I would just choose the last one. Maybe it stemmed from some macabre fear that the train would crash and the cars in the back would be safer, or it was that people usually boarded from the middle and the last cars usually filled up last.

The train departed at 5:02, two minutes late as usual, and the clickety-clack of the joints as we left the yards went perfectly in-synch with my watch. I could see the tracks next to me converging with ours as we headed onto the mainline, and I snapped my fingers impulsively to the *ker-chink-bang-bang* as we went over the rail frogs, and my body followed the carriage as we swayed to and fro between the tracks. Outside, the sky was beginning to darken, and the city lights began to twinkle. My eyes wandered and roved about the scenery that now flew by me. Presently, as the day waned and drew to a close, the ever-changing canvas painted on the windows turned from a rainbow of squares, rectangles, and splashes of green into dots of yellow and patches of black. Soon, the windows gradually resembled more a mirror than its original nature, and my interest shifted from the transforming nightscape to the people whom I was sharing the carriage with.

The girl that was sitting across from me eventually drew

my full attention. She was definitely a high school student, for I recognised that school's particular uniform – I didn't need to closely examine the emblem blazoned onto her uniform to know of the institution's prestige. Nonetheless, she wasn't a bad-looking creature; the tight-fitting blouse betrayed a promising complexion and masked a pair of well-shaped legs, but it wasn't her attractiveness that piqued and maintained my curiosity. Her small hands seemed to delicately hold a notebook in her hands, yet I saw that the fingers could have been chiselled from stone; the knuckles were white and the pink notebook laced with white was crumpling under her death-grip. Her eyes, two deep, unfathomable lakes, stared straight down, the surface of the water quivering with an unfathomable intensity. The mountain in the middle, small and otherwise imperceptible on her face, stood out like a cherry against a field of marble. The lips were tightly pressed and tense, pale and devoid of colour – in her distress, she had unconsciously bit them; a faint trickle of blood was visible. Her hand reached back, fingers tracing the seat behind her, and a black raven descended on her head and draped his wings messily over her ears; its neck feathers ruffled, draping storm clouds over the two dark lakes, but the lakes did not seem to care or notice. The way she held the hairpin tightly in her hand showed her mind was anywhere but here – she was staring into nothingness, lost in her little world. It began to rain outside, the pit-patter of droplets on the metal roof clearly audible above the air conditioning and the ambience of the

commuting express. A raindrop struck her cheek, and the raven ruffled its feathers.

I could feel the brakes being applied as the train pulled into the station; this was the last stop. The doors opened, and the train quickly emptied its few occupants. The bicycles and their masters were already elbowing their way out the door, yet she still sat there, motionless; I hesitated to ask her why she wasn't getting off. This *was* the last stop – the train was turning around in the opposite direction. I got up slowly, almost in a trance. There were only the two of us left on board; what was going through her young, tormented mind? What could possibly distress her so? The conductor blew the whistle, and the masses I sought specifically to avoid rushed past me and crammed into the tiny space; it was suddenly hard to see her between the arms, shoulders, and purses of the various people that were squeezing in between us with ferocious intensity.

I wondered what her name was.

I don't know – I probably never will. I stepped off the train, and took a look back. She was still where she was, head down, hands folded demurely across her lap with the small, pink notebook on top of her fingers, a lost soul among the masses frozen in time.

The doors closed, and with a gentle, high-pitched whine, I watched the train leave.

II. The Teacher

There was a hushed murmur as the school bell indicated that class was over, wafting like a breeze over the school walls. The hallways, empty and silent just moments ago, were suddenly filled with demurely folded skirts, baggy jeans and joyous exultations as the student body disgorged itself from what had been its prison for the past eight hours. Five minutes later, the incessant chatter of schoolgirls and the echoes of enthusiastic teenage boys ready for another weekend of basketball faded, and as soon as the jailbreak began, it was over, and the school was quiet again. It was nearing dusk and at the end of a long week; aside from an occasional teacher slinging one's final belongings over one's beleaguered shoulders, the classrooms were entirely abandoned. This was the scene that had confronted Irene as she stepped out into the hallway. She usually left the school late because she spent the afterschool hours at her desk not only to prepare the next test, but also to plan and tie up any loose ends. This week had a lot of loose ends, so she was running especially late; she finished writing the last detention slip and headed out. The sunlight pouring down in orange rays through the open promenade, coupled with the very sky bathed in a halo of dusty red crafted an overwhelming sense of nostalgia. She stopped at the edge of the school pond to watch the fish – tiny fish she had placed there long ago that were now hulking shadows grazing the murky floor. The rippling surface of the water froze time and space, and her thoughts went back to the days when *she* still wore the uniform and skirt. She could have

sworn that the palm trees' reflections swaying in the mild breeze looked exactly the same twenty years ago.

The sun's reflection pierced her eyes, and she looked away. In the middle of the courtyard, a girl was cuddling against a boy. They were enveloped by the same shafts of light that poked through the green canopy of the school garden, creating a beautiful silhouette. Normally, it was school policy to forbid such behaviour; and she, as a teacher, was supposed to keep an eye out for this and punish the offenders, but there was something about the two of them that mesmerised her. It seemed that the world had faded, and all that she saw were the two of them, surrounded in an aura of innocence. It was even making *her* dreamy.

I'll hold you tender; I'll hold you tight... I'll hold you past the morning light... A pin slipped, and a black raven draped his wings messily over the girl's shoulders. The sun's reflection in the pool began to flash. Irene honestly was starting to wonder how long they would be standing together like that. Their bodies untwined for a second, and Irene realised she was holding her breath.

Come rain, come fire, I won't let go, you're my desire... They aren't going to... Oh my God – they *are*...!

Irene watched in horror and fascination as their lips met – and stayed. Irene thought she was going to faint; cuddling was bad enough, but seeing such an intimate act between two students was something so monstrous that she had never even dared to imagine it before, yet, the sight was invoking something in her that she

highly suspected did not want to be brought up.

The sun's reflection in the pool began to flash, and Irene closed her eyes for a brief second. It was a long time since she had been in love... Then the flashes came. Yes, she did love someone before, but she was not enjoying the bliss that the lovers in the courtyard were. The memories were sour, like spoiled milk, and the flashes were nowhere delightful: they were debilitating and painful. There was a man in her heart, yes, but it was a shadow of him, with his back turned to her. Irene looked at her reflection in the pond again. It was no longer the reflection of a naive young girl blossoming into womanhood; it was a face weathered by age, compromised by a pair of thick horn-rimmed glasses that greeted her eyes; an unassuming middle-aged woman bulging around the thighs. There was a spiking pain in her chest, and she instinctively clutched her heart as she was reminded of...of *everything* terrible in this world.

It was more than enough to snap her out of her reverie. The school did maintain a strict set of rules on such behaviour, and Irene was a teacher well known for her punitive measures. This was high school, not college; rules still applied. The rapid click-click-click of her heels alerted the two lovers of her presence, but they were too late to stop Irene from recording down their numbers blazoned on their clothes. She saw that the boy already had his hand halfway into the girl's blouse; that was more than enough of an excuse.

The girl froze as if struck by lightning as the teacher's swiping hand made contact with her cheek. The boy tried to duck, but wasn't quite fast enough, either. Irene was honestly too tired to yell at them, so she merely shook her head angrily and left the two to consider the consequences of their actions.

She made a quick detour to the central office to file the incident.

Student No. 548318 caught engaging in illicit sexual activities with Student No. 579216 in courtyard. 548318 also resisted corrective measures when caught. Major demerit recommended for No. 548318 and... She paused for a second when she saw the girl's glossy record and excellent marks – compared to that of the boy. And the issuance of a parental warning for No. 579216.

It would be the boy's third demerit, and Irene knew that her opinion alone carried enough weight.

'I'm doing you a favour, girl,' she whispered.

Irene signed the form.

III. The Intern

On the platform, Dan quickly skimmed the lines of his logbook before stepping into the driver cab. Most of the stuff was very familiar – stopping patterns, slow-down areas, and other notes, but what got his attention was the memo stapled on the very bottom.

**Act as intern instructor for new high school dropout.*

Dan gave a quick, internal sigh.

So I'm running a daddy-day-care centre now, too?

'Pre-start-up check complete, doors closed, systems normal. Permission to depart; Signal O.K.,' Dan said as he pointed towards the relevant indicators and green light up ahead.

'Disengaging brakes, set power to Notch One. Target Speed, Zero-Four-Zero. Signal, O.K.' There was a soft, gentle whine as the electric traction motors kicked in. The intern sitting next to Dan gave a quiet chuckle as the train slowly left the station lights behind.

'What's funny?'

'Do you always have to state the commands out loud like that?'

Dan nodded.

'May I ask why?'

A light began flashing in the cab with a loud beeping noise. Dan pushed the button without a glance and told him that pointing and verbalizing commands helped drivers eliminate operational errors, and would help investigators in case of an accident.

'Current speed, Zero-Three-Eight. Target Speed, Zero-Eight-Zero. Set power to Notch Three, Signal O.K.'

The tiny red button flashed again, and Dan pushed it again. Max stared out the front window with a blank stare.

'Current Speed, Zero-Eight-Zero. Target Speed, One-Four-Zero. Signal, O.K. Passing next station, O.K.'

‘This is so pointless,’ Max muttered.

‘This whole intern thing?’

‘Yeah.’

Dan listened thoughtfully as Max spewed out his frustrations, breaking the silence only to state the speed changes.

‘Current speed One-Three-Seven, Switch to Mode ATC, ATC Target Speed, One-Eight-Zero. Set power to Notch Six. System O.K.’

‘She tells me no one loves her... I did, so I do something for her and look at what the fuck happened!’ Max pounded on the armrest in frustration. ‘She gets to stay... bet she doesn’t give two fucks about me.’

‘Hmm... Maybe you should do something ‘bout that...’

‘Dafuq—’

‘I don’t think rustication is within her power, chances are she feels a lot worse than you—you didn’t break up with her, did you?’

‘She’s been calling me nonstop...’

‘And you never answered...?’

Max sighed and shook his head. The two of them sat in silence for a while.

‘Tell you what – why don’t you and I finish this shift together and have a bro’s night out tonight. On me; pizza and football – can’t get any better than that.’

The console beeped again.

‘Current speed, One-Seven-Three, ATC Target Speed, Two-Three Zero. Set power to Notch Seven, Signal O.K.’

‘Dan?’

‘Yeah, Max?’

‘Thanks man – I’m going to call her when I get home, I mean, I can’t use my phone on the job, right? *Right?*’

But Dan wasn’t listening – his eyes were glued ahead. Max couldn’t see anything yet from his angle, but his eyes widened in amazement as Dan’s hands moved in a blur as hell seemed to break loose inside the cab.

‘Current speed, One-Seven-Fiver. Reset Target Speed Zero-Zero-Zero. Activate ATC E-brake One-Zero-Zero. Activate Locomotive Brake Brake One-Zero-Zero. Signal No-GO. Set power to Notch Zero. Activate D-Brake Controls – D-Break Activated. Set Power to Break Twenty-Sixer. Current Speed One-Double-Six...’

As the train rounded the curve, Max could finally see what the fuss was about; what he saw sent him screaming.

‘Current Speed... One-Double-Three.’

‘Current Speed... One-One-Eight.’

‘Current Speed... One-Zero-One.’

‘Current Speed... Zero-Nine-Zero.’

‘Current Speed... Zero-Sev...’

Dan lay his entire weight on the horn in a final crescendo and closed his eyes.

Thud.

IV. The Policeman

Emergencies at this hour are usually unheard of. Usually it's something trivial, like a kid accidentally swallowing some toothpaste or inadvertently setting off the fire alarm while trying to make roast turkey; no, rush hour is what really concerns the police chief. Any scenario that takes place when most people are on the move is a nightmare waiting to happen, so the off-peak hours are a time of relative tranquillity. Therefore, he isn't too concerned – in fact almost bothered, when the phone suddenly rings.

'Police Department, please state your emergency,' he says casually. *If this is a prank call or a false alarm,* he silently swears, *I am going to send squad cars to bring them in – I don't care.*

Ten minutes later however, the man finds himself standing on the railway tracks. Despite the immediacy, there isn't much to be said or anything really to do, really, nothing but to scrub the red marks off the train and the tracks; actually, to hell with that too. The railways have their own cleaning facilities, and forensics is already taking care of it. Already, the forensics team is questioning the driver and his partner; having nothing else to do, the chief watches them stick little marking flags into the ground. *One marker here, another marker fifty paces down the line, another dozen strewn randomly about the adjacent embankment...*

'My, my,' he whispers to himself. 'What a way to go...!'

The man accompanying the driver, a young lad of around seventeen to eighteen, seems especially distraught. The chief pats him on the shoulder.

‘It’s not your fault, my son.’

‘Killed on impact...’ he hears one man say.

Max looks at the police chief with tear-stained eyes.

‘But this *is* my fault...’ Around a hundred meters away, a forensics analyser finds something in the grass – a small pink notebook, laced in white. He sticks another little flag into the ground and moves on.

V. The Parent

It was quite a while after before I had the nerve to step into my daughter’s room again. Everything was neat and tidy, as always. The bed sheets were folded. My beleaguered eyes scanned across the meaningless rack of trophies.

I drove Max away again today – it’s his fault, his fault for breaking her heart, and his fault for distracting the train driver. Irene was right in expelling him.

Sitting on the table was a pink notebook laced with white, now dotted with grey and scarlet stains. I remembered how hard I had fought them for that piece of evidence.

But they kept the pin. I never saw the pin again.

But the notebook was here, sitting quietly on her desk, and it occurred to me that I had never read its contents. Maybe if I

read it, I could understand.

But what point is there to understand? My mind asked in anguish, *it's too late. It won't change anything.*

But I'll understand. I'll understand.

You already know it's his fault.

I know. But I want to know why, why, why she did what she did.

Did I not love her enough?

I opened the first page, adjusted my hair, the wings of the black raven on my head, and let the tears flow.

Daphne Leung

Words will always have me, and I them

I find solace in words
They cradle me in my sleep
calm the storm in me

I find solace in words
The repetition sedates me
The rhyming patterns hypnotises me
The imageries drugs me

When my heart fails to beat
Words replace it
When my mind fails to write
Words replace it

Most of all...
When I am stung by pain
They tell me I'll be forever truly theirs

I find solace in words
I find composure in sentences
I find tranquillity in stanzas

I find silence in poems

Words can be a mighty warrior's sword
to fight alongside justices to restore peace

Words can be a lawyer's weapon in court
to fight against justices to destroy peace

Words...takes your last breath to say it
and a resounding 's' to stand for more than one meaning

Words...takes more than words to say it

Words whisper... like soft round pink petals

Words wail...like an edgy struggling teen

I find solace in words

They cradle me in my sleep

and calm the storm in me

Copyright © 2013 by Department of English, City
University of Hong Kong

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at the address below.

Department of English
City University of Hong Kong
83, Tat Chee Avenue,
Kowloon, Hong Kong
www.en.cityu.edu.hk