Déjà Vu 憶・記: a journal of creative writing
(volume VII, 2010)

Undergraduate majors, Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Contemporary English Studies (2010-2011), Lingnan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.ln.edu.hk/eng_studentjournal

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at Digital Commons @ Lingnan University. It has been accepted for inclusion in BA (Hons) in Contemporary English Studies : Creative Writing Journal by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Lingnan University.
Deja Vu
憶・記
Acknowledgments

This collection owes its existence to a number of people whose hard work, generosity and talent has gone into the words and pages here.

I would especially like to thank Mike Ingham, who has been a tireless inspiration and aid. I would like to thank my editorial team: Connie Kung, Emma Zhang, Kyle Lipinski, Rebecca Hopkins, Sue Lee and Sofie Yuen for helping out in countless ways. Thanks also go to Professor Richard Freadman, for his help in funding the Writer in Residence programme, and also for his work with Life Writing, some of the fruits of which are contained with this anthology.

Wendy Mak has been a great help throughout my time as Writer in Residence.

Thanks also go to Professor Dai Fan, of Sun Yat Sen University, and her students, whose hard work is well represented here.

There are many others who have been of great help, and of course the Lingnan Foundation, who have generously supported the Writer in Residency and this publication.
‘It is by candlelight one enters Babylon; and all roads lead to Babylon, provided it is by candlelight one journeys’

Helen Waddell

Lyrics from the Chinese, 1913
Editor’s Note

When I was at school, no career officer ever asked: ‘Who wants to be a writer?’ There were no leaflets. No guidelines. I never even met another author who might point me in the rough direction, or even – standing far ahead of me on the bleak and windswept heath - give me footsteps within which to set my own.

And really, there is no blueprint. No secret path, or hidden door, no singular road less travelled. But there are many steps; and many of the first are faltering or hesitant and often embarrassing! But all steps, however faltering, lead somewhere, and the writing collected here reflect the many stages of a writer’s life, with toddlers mixing in with old wanderers and wrinkled and published veterans. They are as diverse as a crowd of faces. What unites them is the quality of the writing.

In 200AD, the Chinese poet Lu Chi, author of The Art of Writing, wrote that ‘each writer finds a new entrance into the Mystery’. What is that mystery? Surely it is the experience of being human in a continually shifting and constant world: the essence of our desire to tell our stories.

Lu Chi also spoke of the joy of words – I might add ideas and images and emotions – being hooked up like fish, leaping from the deep. Some of the fishers collected here are new to the art, others a long way along the path. It is an honour to be able to bring this haul together.

Welcome, Dear Reader!
Come fishing...!
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familiar Stranger</td>
<td>Diksha Banya</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinning</td>
<td>Mike Ingham</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Me</td>
<td>Shi Huwen</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flightless Bird</td>
<td>Xie Li Shadow</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were the wind</td>
<td>Chan Laikam Kiwi</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng</td>
<td>Sun Mengtian Katana</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What a Wonderful World</td>
<td>Emily Kwan Oi Ki</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Grandfather in Memory</td>
<td>Vicky Wu</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pearl Necklace</td>
<td>Zhang Hongxuan Emma</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guilt to Be Ended</td>
<td>Chen Yuqing</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Study Night</td>
<td>CY</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’d better... Or you’ll...</td>
<td>Tu Hang Steed</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happily Ever After</td>
<td>Dai Fan</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merry Christmas, Mr. Love</td>
<td>Li Xizhao Lena</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>Young Hui Ming Agnes</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Strawberry Cake</td>
<td>Charmaine Li</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantastic White Night</td>
<td>He Jing</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scar</td>
<td>Chen Ying Cherry</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You stupid girl</td>
<td>Junyce Teo</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Here Waiting</td>
<td>Teo Li Chuan</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>Trista Yeung</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Distance</td>
<td>Tong Khang Zhi Li</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When she was small</td>
<td>Asato Wong</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>Tong Ka Chun</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My First Love</td>
<td>Law Law Yan Angel</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love me</td>
<td>Teo Li Chuan</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poems</td>
<td>Jim Rice</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When You’re Gone</td>
<td>Chow Yik Ling Elaine</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation on Mariah Carey’s ‘Bye Bye’</td>
<td>Tam Hoi Yan Carol</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Are We Head ing?</td>
<td>Chen Liuyan Mandy</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>Tang Sin Yee</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Sunday at Church</td>
<td>Yan Chun Fai Joseph</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brennesselappie</td>
<td>P.K. Leung</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking side</td>
<td>Tong Ka Chun Tony</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Love Letters in Staves</td>
<td>Wu Shujin Amanda</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>Chan Pak Kan Kenny</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love, don’t expire!</td>
<td>Wong Yee Tung Harries</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mnemonic</td>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boy Who Haunts My Dreams</td>
<td>Luna Chan</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Brief History of the Declaration of Independence</td>
<td>Cindy Qi</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I just call to say I love you</td>
<td>Junny Zhang</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond Love</td>
<td>Sadhwni Jagarthi Haresh Charmene</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost in the Night</td>
<td>Celine</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Story of My Life: The Broken Pledge</td>
<td>Huey</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craved Showcase</td>
<td>Wai Wai Leung Vivian</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Villanelles of Hate and Love</td>
<td>Andrew Barker</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memos to Little Jo</td>
<td>Qiao Liangyu</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La réponse est . . . moi aussi!</td>
<td>Sofie Yuen Kar Long</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 217 of My Biography</td>
<td>Leng Wai Lun</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four in the morning</td>
<td>Tai Nga Yan Dian</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreaming Reality</td>
<td>Angela Pang</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Meijyechan</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long summer</td>
<td>Chen Huiqian Phoenix</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of the Paper Tigers</td>
<td>Justin Hill</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributor's Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
déjà vu
[dāzhā vṽ', -vē', -vo o o']

Etymology: Fr, previously seen

the sensation or illusion that one is encountering a set of circumstances or a place that was previously experienced. The phenomenon, which is normal in everyone but occurs more frequently or continuously in certain emotional and organic disorders, results from some unconscious emotional connection with the present experience.

Also known as also called paramnesia, from Greek παρα, 'para,' 'near, against, contrary to' + μνήμη 'mnēmē,' 'memory') or promnesia, is the experience of feeling sure that one has witnessed or experienced a new situation previously. Similar phenomena are déjà entendu 'already heard' (of music, etc.), 1965; and déjà lu 'already read'
Familiar Stranger

Meeting you was
Something familiar, something new
I felt close to you
No matter what

Feels like I can
Talk to you forever
That’s how adorable you are

Your laughter sounds like a child’s
Innocence reflected in it
Wish I could turn back the hands of time
Get to know you then, get to know you now
Spinning

Mike Ingham

I'm not the narrator of this tale, merely a conduit or channel for impressions that come out of thin air. It seems that the events described here must have happened to somebody somewhere, but whether or not they happened to me — or whether I dreamt them — I find it harder every day to determine. It is entirely possible that I dreamed them or rather that the dream was put in my head by some external agency that may at some point metamorphose me into a butterfly — or 'flutterby', as children sometimes say, catching the ambivalence of butterfly metaphors intuitively. Alternatively the brief fable may have come to me many years ago when I saw a Chinese circus in Beijing. I suppose small tales I have read, like those of Kafka — particularly the enigmatic 'A Message from the Emperor' and 'In the Gallery' — as well as the poetic prose tales of Poe and Baudelaire - may have played their part in shaping this brief and deceptively profound — or deceptively shallow? — narrative. I shall leave that to you, dear reader, to decide for yourself. At all events this is either a 'small tale' or a 'tall tale'; take it as you will.

The plate juggler's act begins and I am mesmerized at his finesse, his nimble movements and his adroit fingers. What am I doing here? If I could tell you that I would indeed be an omniscient narrator, so it's perhaps better that I don't attempt to provide the background. The point is that I am here in Beijing on a freezing cold night at the State Circus — there is no heating in the hall, of course, as we're back in 1988, or thereabouts — mesmerized by the gyrations of spinning plates in perpetual motion. The juggler is able to maintain this astonishing act of perpetuum mobile and simultaneously juggle balls, clubs and other miscellaneous items in a bravura show of skill and timing. Other juggling acts one has seen pale into insignificance by comparison. The plates continue spinning at varying tempi and with varying degrees of proximity to collapse and inertia, but — and this is what is hypnotic — often appear to be on the verge of surrendering to the inevitable effects of gravity without actually succumbing. The juggler is almost an abstraction. He is at one with the seemingly
mechanical process; his body is virtually an extension of the plates and other implements, or better to say that these things are an extension of him. It is inconceivable that they will fall.

The onlooker – me or any other, I am no longer sure of the fact - wills that one will fall out of a sheer spirit of malice perhaps; on reflection it is not so much malice as fascination and a compulsive desire for closure or stasis as a contrast with the vertiginous spinning movement. The words of the children’s rhyme come into his head: ‘Ten green bottles sitting on the wall, ten green bottles sitting on the wall, and if one green bottle should accidentally fall, there’d be...’ how many plates? The number seems to be increasing; like trying to count stars in a starry sky; the attempt to follow with the naked eye with an earthbound sense of logic is frustrated. The juggler’s life is inextricably bound up with mine; his success suddenly seems to be mine. I feel the impulse to stand and take a bow. After all the abject failures life inflicts on us, comes this crowning glory in front of a world-wide audience; surely the whole world is looking at us locked together in this mental act of control over inanimate objects. The deep concentration that flows from me to him is beginning to exhaust me; and I think about my family, or is it his family? Does he resemble me or do I resemble him, I wonder? He does not even appear to be of the same ethnicity as myself, or am I deluded in that observation; quite possibly since ethnicity is a cline, a continuum, and not a binary as we sometimes assume it to be.

The narrator of this story told me he once arrived late to meet friends at a performance by French mime artist Marcel Marceau at a town hall venue in Hong Kong, only to be told that he (the narrator/ my alter ego) had already arrived ten minutes previously and was on the far side of the lobby. Following the trembling fingers of his bemused friends he sees himself in profile — his twin, mon semblable, mon frère, dear reader — except of course that I cannot not sure, since I was probably not there. To meet one’s twin, one’s doppelganger (the word is precise, if a trifle pretentious; like the narrator’s entire narration possibly?) in such an unlikely place, to discover one’s surprising but gratifying gift for delicate acts of balance and prestidigitation (there, another pretentiously precise word) on such a night and in such a place is a phenomenon truly to be marvelled at. The performance never ends; at least there is no clear moment of
finitude or closure in his/my consciousness. The slower plates are still rotating while the ones to which the juggler has deftly applied his magical fingers seconds previously are whirling merrily; the gyrations seem to be attuned to the motion of the earth and the stars, a cosmic wheeling and turning. He now knows — no, not knows, rather 'intuits' or 'perceives' — that on that winter evening at the State Circus in Beijing the perpetual motion of his own existence began; there had been a time when relaxation and pleasurably otiose abstention from effort and activity was normal; now it is no longer a feature of his frantically active daily routine; merely a vague recollection of halcyon days when there was no compulsion for endless turning. Indeed he cannot relax his attention for a second; if he does 'one green bottle might accidentally fall'; he knows cognitively that this is not the case, since the motion of the universe will sustain them, but he knows emotionally and subconsciously that without vigilance the whirling orb of his life's action will collapse and fall, prosaically, ignominiously, without the possibility of redemption.

What of me, you may ask? I am still juggling the same plates in a nondescript provincial circus usually for the benefit of a bored and cynical local clientele, who are increasingly looking to rapid technological advances to provide superior entertainment with the result that the aging audience will simply die off and fade away, before the plates ever come to rest. I believe my counterpart, my twin, mon frère — call him what you will — is now a very senior government official, an economic guru, one might say. It seems he is very successful in balancing his books and juggling the national currency against international pressures and the predatory attacks of speculators and the international markets. Folks say he is incredibly wealthy, but that he has not time to spend any of his money. As I watch the plates spinning my life away I reflect on these and other mysteries. One such mystery is the identity of the narrator of this tale I seems to be trapped in. I don't believe it's a person, but rather a computer-generated narrative, because its end is the same as its beginning. You see what I mean? Perhaps you don't. Anyway...I'm not the narrator of this tale, merely a conduit or channel for impressions that come out of thin air....
Follow Me

He comes to visit me
in Hong Kong, bringing
two huge traveling bags.
They are all for me:
winter clothes, books,
chocolates and salted hams.

I take him to Stanley,
he takes pictures of me.
He says he is tired
and goes to bed early.

I remember,
When dad got his driving license
five years ago,
he took us for a trip in Suzhou.
We rented a small grey old van. Nobody
dared to travel in his car
but mom and me.
He took the highway and I the map.
When we arrived, it was dark.
He said he was tired
and went to bed early.
I knew his palms were still sweating.
Mom whispered to me
‘That was frightening.’

When he drove us to Suzhou
three years ago,
it was a black secondhand sedan.
He took the highway and I the map.
When people tried to overtake,
I watched him speeding.
Fields flashed by rapidly
he yelled, ‘Follow me!’
Mom and I couldn’t help laughing.

We visited Suzhou
six months ago.
Dad took the highway and I the map.
This time a champagne coloured
Volkswagen.
He crashed into a barrier.
Our tire was flat.
I called for a rescue while
he was there, smoking.
When we arrived at the cemetery,
It was dark. Dad murmured,
Sorry mom, we are late.
Luckily, our little lass is now big.’

Now that he is sleeping,
I can see the wrinkles on his face prosper.
Wherever I go,
Whatever I do,
He follows me in this strange city.
She stood on the seventh floor, wearing pajamas and slippers. Not having slept or eaten anything for two days, she looked exhausted and haggard.

Tired…’ she murmured. A breeze kissed her cheeks and teased her uncombed hair. She saw the blue sky and the warm sun; she saw the tall building not far behind; she saw two birds flying in the sky.

‘What a fine day!’ she smiled bitterly.

Looking down, she saw a traffic jam. Different coloured cars, squeezed in a narrow street like a swarm of beetles. It should be noisy with all the honking of the cars and the shouting from the drivers. However, she couldn’t hear a thing.

She saw children downstairs playing games vigorously. A little girl fell on the ground, crying for her mother. Two boys clapped their hands, jumped and shouted ‘Chicken heart! Chicken heart!...’ However, she couldn’t feel a thing.

She saw her neighbors coming home, lifting groceries and talking happily to who deeply struck her heart—her mother. Her mother also carried a large bag of groceries. It seemed so heavy for she adjusted her hands and arms several times. Maybe she was going to prepare her a big dinner; maybe she was going to make her favourite pudding; maybe she was going to give her a surprise. However, they were too far away. She couldn’t touch a thing.

She stood stiffly as a sculpture. Her face was expressionless.

Sleepy…’ she mumbled her last word.

She was falling, falling down, falling down from the seventh floor like a bird—a flightless bird.

In my dorm, my roommates and I casually surfed the Internet.

‘Look! A school beauty committed suicide in Shenzhen University.’ Antoinette shouted out.

‘Was it? Why?’ Phoenix asked.
It is said that she was scolded by her teacher. And she couldn't bear the pressure. 'Antoinette explained.

'Oh! What a pity! By the way, was she pretty?'
'Well, I think just so-so…'
'Does she have a boyfriend?'

'Come on, girls. You don’t know her, do you? Suicide cases flood all over the world. Don’t make a fuss.' I said with my hands busy on the keyboard.

I chatted excitedly with my friend who was also in Shenzhen University online. I noticed his signature had changed. 'Deeply mourn for you. God bless you.'

'Hey, buddy. What’s up?'

He said, ‘I felt sad. One junior in our school committed suicide. And I know her.’

'Oh! My god!' I was shocked.

I never imagined she was my friend’s friend. She and I could have been so close to each other. Through one person, we were connected.

I felt sad and depressed. A pang of guilt rose in my heart. One minute ago, I gossiped about the girl with my roommates. And now I learnt that the girl, in some way, was my friend. How ironic! I searched the Internet desperately for all her information and I kept asking myself why. Why would she choose such a way to resolve problems? Why? Why? Why!

'A school beauty committed suicide under pressure!'

Setback education is necessary for college students'

‘Treasure your life…’

I found the news through the Internet. Her name is Yang Qian, which means beautiful and elegant in Chinese, just like her. She looked so lovely and happy in the photos in her blog. A few months before she committed suicide, she wrote an article in her blog to tell people to be optimistic to treasure lives. She was an excellent student in Shenzhen University. She won a scholarship every year. She was good at singing and dancing. She was a leader in the Student Union.

She was only nineteen.
Midnight, I stood on the balcony of the sixth floor, wearing pajama and slippers. Clouds sheltered the stars. Dorms stayed deadly still. Lamps stood lonely. I stepped forward and leaned over the balustrade. I heard a gust of wind whisper in my ears.

I looked down from the sixth floor. It was high. I was afraid. I grasped the balustrade. My whole body pressed close to the balustrade. I felt like I was a climbing plant twined around the balustrade. I kept this posture for minutes until I was able to open my eyes again.

'Now I felt it,' I sighed.

While I was staring down I imagined the feeling of falling down. Everything was happening in a fraction of a second. Did she regret while she fell? Did she struggle for another chance while she fell? Did she think of her mother while she fell?

No one knew.

She left.

She left and left all these questions to us.

Arthur Schopenhauer said, 'Death is not the most terrible. Why do people commit suicide? Because they know something is more terrible than death. We are born with sin. It's our destiny to go through the sufferings. We should not shrink back.'

No more sufferings. May you rest in heaven, flightless bird.
You were the wind

Chan Lai Kam  Kiwi

You were like the wind,
not able to catch but to feel.
In summer, her heart you win.
In winter, her skin you peel.

Indeed you were cool,
all women gave you their souls.
Lucky that I am not a fool
who you knew a long long time ago.
Feng

It was inky dark outside, but she could tell morning was coming, because she heard those roosters crow, finally. She rolled over again.

She knew it was around 5 am, too early to get up. But she felt so awake.

She heard remote barking of a dog from the other side of this small village, the sound of the river which passed right in front of her house, the leaves on the big tree kissing each other in the courtyard, a mouse chewing the old closet in the other room.

But all of those sounds disappeared when the thought of what would happen today struck her. All she could hear was her heart beat like a drum so loud that she was afraid it might wake her mother up. She rolled over again, looked at her mother who slept on the other bed in this room. She listened carefully for her mother’s regular breath, and finally heaved a sigh of relief as slowly as she can. She’d better sleep again or she would be sleepy in the day, she thought.

One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi, four Mississippi, five Mississippi...

Wake up, Feng, it’s time to go. She woke up this time by her mother’s cheerful voice. She felt good to find that the number counting method worked—— it never worked before.

It’s eight now. Your brother will pick us up at nine. No, no. Don’t wear that green sweater. I know, I know, I said green is better last night. But the red one will make you appear warm. Yes, that looks better. Tie up your hair. And shoes, put on your new shoes. Remember, don’t laugh, and keep smiling. Eat as slowly as you can. Don’t talk too much. I will answer some questions for you. And, let me see, what’s left. If they ask about your education, don’t tell them you didn’t graduate from middle school. ’Her mother kept talking and appeared more anxious than herself.

I know. ’She answered reluctantly. It was always hard for her to tell a lie, but it was even harder to disobey her mother, who she loved in awe.
Her father died of esophagus cancer right after she was born, so her mother raised a son and five daughters all by herself, the youngest being Feng. Apart from her brother, her mother loved her the most, so she always tried every effort to avoid letting her mother down.

Therefore, she said yes when her mother told her to drop out of school just like all of her elder sisters because a lack of money, although she loved going to school. She said yes when her mother told her to break up with her ex-boyfriend who was 'too poor' as her mother put it, although she loved him even till now. And a few days ago, she said yes when her mother told her to go on an arranged date with someone downtown, although she really didn't want to get married and leave her mother alone, since all of her sisters and brother had already got married and left.

But she is, after all, a young lady. So on the way downtown, she kept wondering about the man—is he tall or short; is he fat or thin; is he gentle; has he read a lot of books...

When they arrived at the restaurant, they were zealously greeted by the mother who had been waiting at the door. She was lead to the private room. Feng was a little surprised. Because she thought people downtown would put on airs and act arrogant and contemptuous. She felt much relieved.

Her heart raced again when they arrived at the private room. The elder man in the room welcomed them warmly and the younger smiled gently. Feng tossed a quick glance at the younger one and sat at the table.

The parents were already talking passionately like old friends, and Feng sat upright, eyes fixed at the bowls before her on the table, while she actually was examining the young man with split vision.

He was a little taller and stronger than medium build and always wore a very gentle and shy smile. She could feel that he glanced at her from time to time. She blushed.

'All right, let's start ordering. The kids are already starving. Hahaha,' the father looked at Feng and asked: Dear, what dished do you like? Can you eat hot food?

'Yes, yes. Anything will do for me.' Feng was so nervous that she even forgot she couldn't eat hot food.

What about you, Qiang?' Feng's mother asked the young man.
‘Anything will be fine.’ He smiled extremely shyly, scratched his hairs, and looked down at his hands again.

Feng suddenly realized that he was even more nervous than she was. She even saw sweat on his forehead. Sympathy towards the man replaced her nervousness.

Poor thing. How nervous is he! He must have a too gentle and soft soul to stand the tense. It turns out that the city isn’t as scary as I’ve thought. There are warm and gentle souls in the city, too. I’m so lucky to come across one such family. I should tell sis Ying this. She always tells me how dark and dirty the citizens’ hearts are, and how they always hide malice behind their smile. She described them as mean, arrogant, insidious and pure evil. I must tell her to stop holding prejudice towards the citizens.

‘That’s all. Ten dishes in all.’ The father said politely to the waiter.

‘Everything is expensive downtown.’ Feng’s mother remarked looking at the prices on the list.

Yes. But the salary downtown is high, too. And if Feng comes, she needn’t worry about the house. We already bought a big flat with three rooms and two living rooms.’ The mother looked at Feng keenly.

Feng smiled shyly back.

‘Where do you work again, Qiang?’ Feng’s mother asked the young man.

‘In the post and telecom office.’ The father answered, looking at Qiang, who drooped his head again.

So you must be busy working there.’ my mom said to Qiang again.

‘Not so busy, because he works in the secretary room.’ His father answered.

Feng saw that Qiang got more and more nervous and was afraid he would break down. So she managed to switch the topic to something else.

Without Qiang’s much participation, the lunch talk went on smoothly, and the two families said goodbye to each other at around 3 pm.

As soon as they got on the car, Feng’s mother said excitedly: ‘Our Feng is so lucky! Finally she can leave that small village and live in the city. That lad gets good salary and he’s not tough, so it’s guaranteed that he won’t treat you badly. How lucky are we!’
Feng felt happy because her mother was happy. He’s really gentle and shy. I can tell he’s a good guy. And the whole family is warm and kind. But... we are not going to settle this down immediately, are we?'

‘No, of course not. We won’t agree to the marriage unless they agree to put the flat under your name. You know, no one knows what will happen, if that lad wanted to divorce years later, at least we will get something from it.’ Her mother answered.

Feng’s brother said impatiently: ‘That’s unrealistic! You do realize we are from the countryside, and are inferior to them, right? We should be kissing their ass, not asking for some god damn apartment, if we want this marriage work out!’

‘Darling, I know. But I really want to make sure that this’s a good thing happening to your sis, ok? Do tell them my condition, ok?’ She prayed to her son.

‘All right, all right. I’ll try. But I don’t think they will agree unless they are fool. By the way, they seemed really nice. How come I didn’t find out before? Maybe I should consider asking them to recommend a job for my daughter.’ He said.

‘Yes. You should! And don’t forget it. Tell me as soon as you get their answer.’ Mom said, excited.

Feng never had a chance to tell her mother that she didn’t want to get married so fast and why. Every time she summoned up her courage and was about to say it, she saw the happiness, which she hadn’t seen for a long while, on her mother’s face, she gave up. She convinced herself that she could come back home from time to time, and this might be the best shot she would ever get.

Miraculously, other family accepted their condition. That night, all Feng’s sisters and brother gathered at the house and had a big family celebration. Her mother was very happy and even drank a little alcohol; Feng was very happy, too.

Feng met Qiang again before the wedding ceremony. But she couldn’t talk to him much either this time. The father and the mother were more kind and warm than the last time, and always answered questions for their too-shy son.
He will be much better once you two are more familiar to each other.' The mother smiled and said.

A month later, the wedding ceremony was held. Many of Feng’s relatives came but Qiang’s relatives were much fewer.

‘It’s a pity that we don’t have such big family as yours.’ Qiang’s mother explained to Feng’s mother.

Feng, alone in the bride’s room, was extremely anxious and sad at the thought that she won’t be able to be around her mother to take care of her, and that she would live a totally different life. She sighed.

Suddenly, the door opened and Qiang sneaked in.

‘What are you doing here! You aren’t supposed to see me.’ Feng stood up and said, face blushed with astonishment and shyness—this was the first time she and he were alone.

Qiang peeped out from the door, made sure no one was coming and turned back shyly and nervously:

‘I know. Mom and dad don’t allow me to see you by myself before we get married. But I just came for this.’

He drew out something from his pocket and put it in Feng’s hands and said:

‘This’s my favorite candy. I just want to tell you that, that I really like you.’

With this, Qiang ran out from the room, happily like a little child.

Feng was stunned. She felt something was weird about Qiang. An ominous thought hovered in her mind. But it was too scary for Feng to think that way.

It can’t be! That’s impossible. Relax, you’re just imaging things. You’re too anxious and too sensitive. How can I think like that. They were so nice and kind to me. They are the kindest couple I’ve ever met. Few citizens are so kind to us like they are. She apologized and prayed for forgiveness in heart. The sense of guilt blinded her eyes.

The ceremony went on smoothly, only that by the end Qiang was extremely drunk. When Qiang’s mother helped Feng to take Qiang home, it was already 2 am and Qiang was fast asleep.
Those fools. I've told them not to go too far but they kept toasting. And now, look at him. I'm so sorry that they spoiled your wedding night. It seems he won't be able to... 'Qiang's mother said and looked at Feng pitifully.

That's ok, mom. 'Feng said shyly, 'You must be very tired. Why don't you go home and I will take care of him.'

No. Why don't you poor little thing take a shower and have a good sleep. And I will disappear as soon as I get him in bed.' Qiang's mother patted on Feng's shoulder kindly.

Feng felt so warm and again confirmed herself that scary thought was totally ridiculous.

After a sleepless night, Feng woke up by a knocking on her bedroom door.

Feng, time to get up and have breakfast.' It was Qiang's mother.
Feng put her clothes on immediately and went out to the living room.
Qiang's mother was busy carrying breakfast from the kitchen.

'Mom! Why did you come? Isn't that Qiang and I should go and pay you and dad a visit?' Feng helped with the breakfast.

'Forget about all the etiquettes, honey. You must be tired. From today on, you are my daughter and I won't let anything bother you.' Qiang's mother said and gave her a warm and determined smile.

'Thank you, mom.' Feng moved to tears.

'Have you waken Qiang?' Feng asked.

Qiang's mother passed Feng a bowl of steamed egg and said: No. Let him sleep. He will wake up when he's hungry. Let's have a mother-daughter talk while we enjoy our breakfast, shall we?'

Feng smiled and nodded.

'I can tell you are a great daughter. You loved your mother deeply. Your mother must be a very kind and loving woman.' Qiang's mother said.

'Not exactly. She's rather strong and tough. And she loves to keep everything under her control. But I still loved her.' Feng answered.

'If she did something wrong out of love for you, will you still love her?'

Qiang's mother asked
Well, I must say yes. I will love her no matter what she did. 'Though she felt the question was a little weird, but Feng still answered it without second thought.

'I picked the right person.' Qiang's mother relieved. So tell me more about your family, dear.'

'As you know, my father died when I was very young. I never knew what a father was. But I have four sisters and a brother. They all loved me a lot. I remember once...'

Time passed quickly while they told each other stories about themselves. It was eleven now.

'It's almost noon. I must go downstairs to buy some vegetables. Would you accompany me?' Qiang's mother asked.

'I'd love to, mom. But I should stay and wash the dishes.'

'You needn't do that. I'll wash them after I'm back. Come with me, dear.'

'Mom, you've been so nice to me and done so much for me. I must do something that I can to pay you back. Please, let me.' Feng begged.

After some time of mind struggling, Qiang's mother nodded reluctantly:

'How can I say no to my cleat* daughter.'

Although she already missed her mom, Feng felt warm and washed the dishes happily, singing a light ballad.

Suddenly, she heard the door open.

'That's so quick, mom.' She looked into the living room.

It was Qiang, who just walked out of his bedroom.

Seeing Feng, Qiang burst into laughter.

'Ha-ha! Mom didn't cheat me! It's true. Are you going to live with us?' He asked briskly.

The room was quiet except the bicker from the water tap.

Why is it always wired every time I'm alone with him? What does he mean? He's like, like...'

'Ah, that's my favorite steamed egg.' Qiang happily rushed to the table.

'Did mom come? Where is she now? I want to play with her.'

Smash! The plate on Feng's hand dropped down and smashed into pieces.

She leaned on the wall. Her worst nightmare came true. It was like the whole world around her was falling apart.
So everything was merely a big lie! Now things get more reasonable. That’s why they were so extremely kind to me! That’s why they agreed to our condition generously! That’s why they had to drunk him on the wedding night! That’s why they daren’t let me be alone with him! Everything was fake! The kindness, the smile, the heart-to-heart talk… Everything was just a trap! They are just a bunch of demon. Am I on earth, or in hell?

She walked back to her bedroom like a zombie. She couldn’t hear anything. She couldn’t hear Qiang ask her worriedly what was wrong. She found everything around her disgusting and scary. She just wanted to pack up her things and leave this place as quickly as she can.

She didn’t brought much thing here, so in no time she was all packed and was about to leave, when the door suddenly opened.

Peaches are very cheap today, so… ’Qiang’s mother was petrified to see what was happening.

But Feng didn’t give her the time to be shocked. She walked out of the door. Qiang’s mother grabbed Feng’s arms desperately and cried out:

Please, don’t go, Feng! You said you would still love your mother no matter what she did. You know, I just did this out of love of Qiang. And we really liked you. All the other things are real. It’s just that, that Qiang is an eight year old boy inside. He and all of us are kind; we don’t want to hurt you. Please, have pity on me and Qiang. No one likes him. Don’t let my family end!’

Feng tried very hard to hold her fury and said:

My sister was right. ’She ditched away the hand clung to her arms, tossed a despising look at the woman and left.

She went back to her small village. Her mother was furious, too and roared out more than four hours of cursing towards the family. After the burst of anger, she was exhausted and after a while of silence said:

‘Don’t tell anybody, yet. All the villagers were informed that you got married to a promising husband. All the girls have set you as a model. Let me see how we can make it right. Now you go to bed and have a sound sleep, honey.’

Feng nodded. Although it was not cold tonight, she shivered.

The next day, Qiang and both his parents came. They greeted them like nothing had happened (information in such a small village can travel even
faster than the internet). After Feng’s mother made sure that no one was around the house and had locked the door, she began scolding them.

The parents listened to her modestly, without interrupting and nodded from time to time. Her anger was eased a little after a while. A single-rolled play can never last long. She soon felt like to hear what they would say.

So, why are you here? What do you want? To hurt my daughter again? she sneered.

The parents looked at each other.

Suddenly, they knelt down (surprising both Feng and her mother) and the father said:

'We know what we did was unforgivable and not a day we passed without feeling guilty. But since you are a mother, too, we beg you to think in our place. And if we don’t do anything, our family will have no offspring, which is the biggest unfilial. We know that it’s impossible to ask Feng to live with Qiang like an ordinary couple. But here we thought of a backup plan. Please, just take it as Feng was just sharing the same flat with Qiang. They’re just roommates. We will provide anything you want. The flat, foods, we will buy Feng a store, and we won’t confine any part of her life, as long as she live with Qiang and pretend to be his wife. Please, only you can save my son. With this they kowtowed, tears surged out.

Both Feng and her mother were speechless for a while. Feng couldn’t help feeling pity for Qiang, who was extremely scared and kept sobbing, not knowing what was going on.

‘You don’t need to answer us now. Just think about it. We’ll wait for you.’ They stood up and were about to leave when Qiang suddenly burst out crying:

‘I don’t want to go. I like Feng. I want to play with her.’ His tears wet the earth below.

Stop it! Don’t you get it! Feng doesn’t like you! Now, go.’ Qiang’s mother dragged Qiang out and they left. But Qiang’s cry of words still reverberated in Feng’s mind.

Several weeks passed, they didn’t hear anything from the family again. Feng was beginning to think that maybe they had given up and she can move on her life again, when one day, her mother suddenly said to her:
You know, that kind of life is much better than you marrying a country boy, without doubt. But after these days' thinking, I came to realize that it might as well be better than you marrying a normal city guy. Because, a normal city guy, with his inborn superiority, will bully you and you always have to grovel to them. But with this guy, it'll be the opposite! They must treat you well because they need you. What do you think, darling? Maybe that's not such a bad idea. And besides, you're still the model of the young girls.'

Maybe it was a little cold, Feng chilled.

She didn't know what to say. She never thought that could be an option. She was scared and shocked that she felt what her mother said was insane when she heard them. But she tried very hard to convince herself that her mother was reasonable, rational and practical, while she might be too childish and unrealistic. But what echoed in her mind was only one sentence:

I'm going to live with a retarded person for the rest of my life!

'Give me some days to think about it, mom.'

Today, ten years later, when I look at my aunt, Feng and her little daughter in the photo, I can't help noticing her half-gray hair and the deep frown on her forehead. When I look into her eyes, I seem to hear her screaming:

'Get me out of here!

It's weird that sometimes when one try desperately hard to understand something ridiculous, finally they'll, no matter voluntarily or obliged, no matter seemingly or truly. It's also weird that what huge wrongdoings people can do in the name of love, be it consciously or unconsciously.

I never knew the reason why aunt Feng accepted that lifetime deal; neither can I image what she had suffered in the last ten years and whether she will continue life with Qiang like that, but last night, I chatted with her on the phone and she said:

'Ling (her daughter) is going to second grade next year and she's super smart. Just like me when I was young, hahaha. And she missed you a lot. You have to come and see her this winter, or she's gonna kill me.'
The term *déjà vu* was coined by a French psychic researcher, Émile Boirac (1851–1917) in his book *L’Avenir des sciences psychiques* (‘The Future of Psychic Sciences’), which expanded upon an essay he wrote while an undergraduate.
I have been traveling around the world these days. And I have been to four beautiful countries. On the first trip I saw trees of green, red roses too. I saw them bloom for us. And I thought to myself, ‘What a wonderful world!’

In the second country I visited, I saw skies of blue, and clouds of white. I enjoyed the bright blessed day and the dark sacred night there. And I thought to myself, ‘What a wonderful world!’

In the third country, I saw the colours of the rainbow so pretty in the sky. They were also on the faces of people going by. I saw friends shaking hands saying ‘How do you do?’ Their sweet smile looked as if they’re saying ‘I love you’.

On the last trip I spend quite a lot of time there. I heard babies cried and I watched them grew. I knew they would learn much more than I’d ever know. And I thought to myself, ‘What a wonderful world!’ ‘Yes, I thought to myself, ‘What a wonderful world!’

It is a chilly night cloaked with absolute darkness. Deadly silence as the place always is. No sound of wind and the freezing air seem to come from nowhere. A hospital stands solitarily at the night with no moon nor stars, not even lamplight.

Inside ward 507, the sound of breathing mingles with the dripping of water that interweaves a peaceful symphony. Drip. Pause. Drip. Pause. Drip. Pause. Suddenly, the tap water stop dripping and the abrupt quietude wakes me from my dreams. For the first time I open my eyes in these five years.

My eyes are wide open but in front of me is complete darkness. No more traveling dreams but darkness. My futile attempt to find light makes me unsettled. Faltering towards the door in dark, I stumble over a stool beside the bed. I fall to the floor and a pain on my knee strike me badly. I groan.

Finally the sun rises, lights come in from the window and I finally can see things clearly. But everything seems to be so different from my dreams.
On the table I see molded cheese of green, black clothes too. I read the newspaper and see that they swap the bomb for meat and juice. And I think to myself, 'Who abandoned the world?'

I look out of the window and I see bird dies of flu, and crowds of fight. These quite messy days. These dark hatred nights. And I think to myself, 'What a realistic hell!'

I go out on the street and see the killer with no shadow, who is so hideous on that side. He also points the faces of people going by. Round the corner I see gangs shaking hands, saying 'How do you do?' They're really saying 'I don't trust you.'

I go to the garden and I hear daisies sigh, ice-like and cold. They'll bloom no more, as far as I know. And I think to myself, 'Who abandoned the world?' Yes, I think to myself, 'Who abandoned the world.'

In early May 1997, I was released from the hell of public exams and was given a vacation, long enough for me to find a decent part time job and work as an intern at a call centre. I thought the holiday would be the same as the previous one, equally dull and monotonous. But life didn’t turn out the way I thought.

News: My grandfather had throat cancer.
Reason: Smoking.

Frankly, it was no surprise. Cancer was long known to be the top threat of smokers. What we didn’t expect is how quickly it spread. From that time on, we had come across the topic of visiting my grandfather in Fujian together for several times. My father and I could set out at once since he owned a factory in Shenzhen and I was having holidays. But then, my brother was attending school and my mother working. The plan was postponed again and again. Finally, we made up our mind to go in the first week of July while my brother and mother rejoined us afterwards. That was our plan. Our very plan.

On Tuesday, 26th June 2007, I was working as usual. I looked at the time on the computer screen — which said 5:15 — when my cell phone vibrated in my pocket. I sneaked off to the washroom and answered the call.

What? ‘I exclaimed, pressing my phone closer to my ear.

‘You need to leave work right now and meet your father at the main entrance of your building.’ My mother’s voice came from the other end of the line.

‘But why? I thought... you ... said we’re leaving next week.’ I choked.

‘Not next week. There’s no time to waste. Your grandfather is dying.’ She said worriedly.

Dead air surrounded me. It seemed the time was frozen. My limbs turned weak, merely able to support my body. For the first time in my life, I didn’t want to believe my ears.

It was one of the nights when my grandfather stayed in our house.
What is that in the glass water, Mama? I asked, staring at it hard.

'Hush, Your grandpa is sleeping! That thing inside is his false teeth.' She whispered.

'Teeth? Why are they not in grandpa’s mouth?’ I was in shock. A blow of cold air made me shiver.

'Honey, you’ll understand why when you grow up. Now, come with me. It’s time for bed. Otherwise, you’ll catch a cold.'

Obediently, I tiptoed back to my bed, making sure not even a single sound was heard. At the age of eight, I knew nothing about old people. I didn’t know why they always ate congee with fish and vegetable but not rice with meat. I didn’t know why they couldn’t stand straight. I didn’t know anything.

I was too innocent.

In my memory, my grandfather was a tall man made of skin and bones, just like a stick. He had gray hair, heavy eye bags and pale lips. He always put on his reading glasses before opening any newspaper. Once, I asked my mother about the black dots on my grandfather’s face. All she told me was that they came with age. Not till later did I find out the proper name for them — liver spots. But beyond these signs of old age, in fact, he was a very energetic man in his seventies. He was never tired of walking. Every morning of his stay, he was always the first to get up. Very often, he would take a walk in the park downstairs and start counting how many steps he walked. There was a time when he visited the Tian Tan Buddha Statue in Lantau Island, he marked down ‘268’ in his notebook after walking up the long and painful stairs. When my aunt told us about the incident afterwards, we had a good laugh over it. Counting steps is definitely one of his passions.

In my family, no one smokes, which is a good thing and I’m proud of it. There were times when the smell of cigarette smoke invaded our home. It was when my grandfather came to stay with us. He has fallen into the habit of smoking for more than half of his life. For the sake of our health, he usually smoked in the kitchen besides the large window or rather, outside of the house. Even so, as a kid, I was excited to see him or grandmother because I knew I would be given a red packet, no matter which season of the year. Even when I became an adult, this ‘tradition’ never changed. One time, they even brought
my brother and me to ParknShop and we went home with a large bag of snacks. We had happy moments together.

Without second thought, I dashed out of the washroom and talked to my supervisor. Returning to my seat, I collected all my belongings and was ready to leave. I saw my father’s car waiting for me in front of the building. My great aunt and cousin Emily, who were already in the back seats, waved to me. Sitting next to the driver’s seat, we headed to Lo Wu Station. Much to my surprise as well as relief, my father had managed to pack some clothes for both of us. This surely had to do with my mother, who was compelled to work in the office at the time. But most important of all, my Home Return Permit was now ready in my hands.

Within an hour, we passed the border to Shenzhen successfully and were on our way to the airport. My great aunt had already ordered the tickets to Fujian as soon as possible this afternoon and the flight would depart at 7:30 pm. Besides the four of us, my younger uncle together with his wife and children came to join us as planned. We managed to have a quick meal at KFC before getting on the plane.

My grandparents lived in a small rural town where two-story stone houses and motorbikes were everywhere. Also, every house had a watchdog, in my opinion, full of dirt. Due to the long distance, we visited each other every few years. Honestly, I was not used to village life because of my fear of animals, let alone insects. I was terribly afraid of the big black dog at the gate. Whenever he saw or heard a stranger, like me, he would bark and jump crazily, which made me feel extremely uneasy even though I knew he was fastened by a chain. But on the other hand, he proved himself to be a good watchdog, definitely not a tame one since he had bitten my younger uncle’s butt long time ago. To top it off, there was the golden cat wandering in the house. Out of nowhere, she always made me scream. I used to call her ‘creepy cat’ for she loved to walk by my feet or even stay under my chair while I was having my meal. Every time she did so, I had to rest my feet on another chair for my entire meal. It was very frustrating indeed.
My father made a call asking about his father before we got on the plane. Since it was an urgent order of tickets, we were given separate seats. The fact that I had a window seat lifted my spirit. While the plane was ascending, I looked out of the window and was delighted to get a bird’s eye view of the city. Reaching the thick layers of clouds, I decided to lay back and close my eyes while listening to the music from my mp3 player. It seemed like an hour’s flight would last forever. Maybe it was my anxiety. How I wish I could fast forward through time the way I could with a video. I was simply tired of waiting.

Thank God we were finally on the soil of Fujian, my homeland. Somehow I felt something different. I wonder what had lightened up the atmosphere. Maybe the fact that we were going to see my grandfather soon did the magic. With the relaxed smile on my father’s round face, the laughter and excitement of the children and the soft moonlight, hope and peace were floating in the air. In no time, we got in the cars sent by my elder uncle and once again we were on our way.

The last leg to our destination.

Till now, I still feel ashamed of the fact that I don’t speak southern Min dialect, which is the mother-tongue of my grandparents. Since my parents have immigrated to Hong Kong when they were young, Cantonese has become their everyday language. Also, I hate the fact that I don’t understand a single word of it. My parents didn’t need to lock in their room or whisper when they told secrets. They simply switched to Min dialect, knowing that it’s the safest way of all. Still, if they were talking about me, I could sense it. Even though I got used to their annoying habit and pretended to react indifferently, anger and devastation ran through my body, and deep down, I couldn’t help cursing them. At the same time, I blamed myself for my stupidity. Every time when my grandparents talked to me using a dialect I don’t understand, I would turn to my parents for translation. Thankfully, my grandfather spoke a little Mandarin because he had studied in Shanghai for several years when he was young. That was why sometimes we could talk to each other without others’ help. But still, it was rare.

I remember one morning I saw my grandfather bending over at the dining table writing, a newspaper lying open. Curiously, I sat down next to him
and found out he was copying the title of the news. As expected, his handwriting was beautiful and nothing comparable. He then wrote every one of our names in a manner I couldn’t help staring blankly. It was like looking at the sea in the bus during a traffic jam, or watching a kite flying in the sky while lying on the grass. Empty but peaceful. I would never forget his handwriting, his steady hand and his concentrated expression.

I would never forget this moment. It had touched my soul.

Sometimes, things didn’t always turn out the way we thought.

The driver was a stranger to me, but from the way he greeted us, I knew he was my relative. They chatted in Min dialect. I sensed something was wrong, terribly wrong. I hate myself for not understanding their language. I searched my cousin’s eyes for help.

All she told me was, ‘He passed away when we were on the plane.’

I was speechless. We were drowning in silence.

After a minute or so, my aunt began to sob in grief. At the same time, my vision blurred.

‘Papa, you promised to wait for me! You promised!’ She broke down completely and wept.

I wanted to comfort her, but the words stuck in my throat. A tear rolled down my cheek. Words lost their meaning at that moment. I felt like the throb of my heart had stopped, leaving me in huge pain. All of a sudden, the car came to a halt. For the first time, I wanted to freeze time. I didn’t want to face what was coming next.

We got off the car. Through my blurry eyes, I could see some people mourning on the ground. Next to them was my grandfather’s body covered by a white sheet. My feet were only able to carry me one step forward. From that distance it was enough to make me break down in tears. Nothing could ease the pain in my heart. Since entering my adult life, I never cried like a baby before. Never. It seemed everything inside me broke loose. I could hear nothing but my own uncontrollable sobs. I stood there crying till I ran out of energy.
I regret not coming earlier. I regret not seeing him one last time. I regret letting him down. I regret not spending more time with him when he was still alive. It was my fault. I’m the worst granddaughter in the world.

One cannot turn back the clock. It’s too late.

For the next few days, we sat next to his body lying in a temporary coffin and burnt paper money for him by day and night. No tears for me anymore. I ran out of tears after that very night. At least, that was what I thought. Every day, I saw something new was made for my grandfather in heaven. There were a big paper cat and a large plane occupying an entire room. A large stage of heaven together with lots of gods and goddesses on clouds waving hands, posters of my grandfather sitting in a grand office, living in a huge mansion, driving a Ferrari and so on were all dedicated to and in honour of him. Every one of us, including my mother and brother who arrived the next morning, fulfilled our duties to help as much as possible. But after all, I believe no one was more in pain than my grandmother. She lost her appetite and cried feebly every time the thought of her dead husband struck her.

The day of his cremation and burial had finally come. Another day of unbearable pain. When the workers moved my grandfather’s body to the car, we cried as hard as before. Being the eldest son, my father held my grandfather’s handsome photo while all of us held the long rope tied to the car and walked for more than an hour under the bright sun. My father and his four brothers and sisters were led by a group of Taoists, followed by us grandchildren and other relatives. At that time, I didn’t know we were heading to the crematory. Never had I imagined witnessing the burning of my grandfather’s body in my life. When we arrived, all of the family members kneeled in front of the incinerator, watching the workers lift his body out of the box and place him on the rail, rolling him towards the fire. My brain was empty. All I could do was crying out his name, wishing it could save him from being taken away. I trembled vigorously and couldn’t stop myself from crying. My brother, who didn’t shed a tear since the day of my grandfather’s death, at last lost his self control. My heart was bleeding for the second time. I wondered if my wound would ever heal.

Maybe never.
One year later, when I was spring-cleaning my bedroom, I found a bracelet made of red beads and a note with three words 'My grandfather’s gift' written in my handwriting. The memory hit me once again. I remember the time he gave me the bracelet and told me to try it on, he was wearing a content smile, one that I would never forget.
The Pearl Necklace

Zhang Hongxuan Emma

Come and see this," Brother called, gesturing me to go to his desk.

A little surprised by this invitation, I went over immediately. Brother is eight years my senior, he normally would rather me stay out of his way. When he had to entertain me under our parent’s orders, he never bothered to cover up his annoyance. But today he was a little different; his long narrow eyes were gleaming with excitement. His thick lips spread into a mysterious smile.

'Take a look at this,' he handed me a picture secretively; it was a wrinkled black and white photo with many young faces on it.

What’s the big deal? It’s only your year photo. I get one of these from my school every year. Whatever did you do to get it so beaten up and wrinkled? I asked. At age eight, I was quite proud of the fact that I could manage to keep my books clean and neat, while my sloppy Brother would turn a brand new book into tissue paper over night.

Normally Brother would react to my ‘whatever did you do’ comments with a ‘you are sounding like your country Mum’ comeback, but today he didn’t bother.

Who is the prettiest girl there?" he asked with eagerness, his face turning red like a ripened peach.

Errr…… I looked, everyone in the picture was wearing a white button down shirt and blue pants because that was the standard outfit for taking school photos. People didn’t have school uniforms then, and when photo day came, many students needed to borrow from similar sized friends as their own families could not afford such a ‘smart’ outfit.

It was hard for me to pick ‘the prettiest’ face from a photo with fifty-six people, twenty-five girls. For one thing, each face was the size of a pea.

This one?’ I finally pointed to a girl with large eyes and bob cut hair.

‘No!!! She is very mean, nobody likes her. Gee, isn’t it obvious? I thought you were smart!'
I was under pressure to prove myself a truly smart sister. I quickly pointed to another girl with curly hair.

‘No way! You really don’t have an eye for this.’

My following attempts were equally unsuccessful.

‘You blind little mouse!’ Brother grumbled. ‘This is the one!’

He pointed to a slim girl with long braided hair resting on her left shoulder. She had a clean face that made me think of clear water. She wore a gentle smile, like a soft ripple spread over a crystal lake.

‘Isn’t she clearly the prettiest one in this class?!’ Brother exclaimed, a big silly smile on his face, revealing his oversized teeth. He was standing right behind her in the picture; a big happy smile similar to this one turned his narrow eyes into two thin curvy lines.

I couldn’t see how she was prettier than those I had chosen, but I needed to convince Brother that I was smart after all, so I nodded in agreement.

‘I found out where she lives,’ Brother whispered in my ear, his voice quivering with excitement, ‘and I’m gonna go see her this Sunday!’

‘Where does she live?’

Hui Yang Factory compound!

Hui Young Factory compound was the furthest place from home I knew. A couple of my Dad’s students were from there and they never went home when school was over. They lived in dormitories in school, and often had time to come over and visit my Dad. To me, Hui Yang Factory Compound meant ‘the other side of the world’.

‘See this?’ Brother waved two fifty cent bills in front of my eyes.

‘This’ll cover the bus fare.’

‘Wow, where did you get that!’ a whole Yuan was a fortune then.

‘My lunch money.’ Brother ate lunch at school and he got two Yuan and forty cents per week lunch allowance.

‘But you can’t go that far by yourself! Mum isn’t gonna let you! You’ll get lost.’

‘Shush! She’s gonna hear you!’ He pulled me closer and looked into my eyes. ‘Now I know you are very smart, and very good at keeping secrets, right?’
I nodded. I was proud of being a secret keeper. Brother only shared his secrets with me.

I'll go there this Sunday. Tell your Mum and Dad that I'm going to Zhou Guanchong's house to practice Chemistry, and will be back late, okay?' Brother always called Mum and Dad 'your Mum and Dad' as if they were not related to him. I knew that was because Dad beat him regularly and Mum nagged him all day.

'Do this for me and I'll get you a toy panda that can hit the drum when you wind it up. I heard they sell it there at Hui Yang Factory, I'll get you one, I promise.'

'Sure thing!' My eyes brightened at the thought of a drumming panda.

That Sunday Mum and Dad were in a good mood because Brother was finally doing the responsible thing, consulting with his peer mentor about Chemistry, one of his weaker subjects. Dad sat at his desk and marked stacks of paper, Mum sat in the sunny yard and hand washed our laundry all afternoon. It was a rare peaceful and relaxing afternoon, as Mum and Dad didn't get on each other's nerves and start their usual bickering. I dipped a broken plastic tube that once was part of a pen into the soapy water from Mum's wash and blew big bubbles. I watched the rainbow coloured bubbles dreamily drifting in the air, shimmering under the sun, and then quietly vanishing one by one. I imagined the toy panda that could beat a drum, a legendary toy that I had never seen, that Brother had seen once in a shop in Beijing. Excited about the prospect of getting the dream toy, I kept peeping at the gate and hoping to catch Brother as soon as he came back.

When the sun turned orange and soft, and all of our laundry were up on the lining in the yard, I finally caught sight of Brother turning into the narrow alley. His hair was sticking straight up from the wind and his whole body was wrapped in a layer of dust. I ran to him and took his sleeve, 'Panda, where's the drumming panda you promised me?'

'Errrr... I thought I'd find one in Hui Yang Factory Compound, but they didn't have it there,' he answered with an embarrassed smile.

'Awww, you lied to me, I'm gonna tell Mum and Dad what you did!' I wailed.
No! If you tell your Dad then I’m dead,’ Brother begged desperately, ‘I really looked everywhere there, they didn’t have it!! I’ll get you one next time I see it, I swear!’

Dinner helped me to recover from the pain of not getting my dream panda. After the meal, curiosity sent me climbing into Brother’s bed. He had a book on his knee, but hadn’t turned a single page since he finished dinner.

So, did you find her?’

‘Uh, I did.’

‘How?’

‘After I got there I remembered that I didn’t know her address, I just knew that she lived in the compound somewhere. So I just wandered around the building blocks hoping to bump into her.’

‘And?’

‘I really did!! She came out of a building with a couple of other girls. I wanted to hide but it was too late. She saw me. She looked surprised. And she asked ‘Zhang Honghao, what are you doing here?’ ”

Then, what did you say?’

‘What could I say?! My head went all blank and I just said ‘Errr... just walking around...’, so she said bye and walked away with her friends.’

She walked away?! That was it?’

‘Uh, that was pretty much it.... I waited at the foot of her building hoping that she’d come back but she didn’t. It got later, so I caught the bus and rode back.’

‘You blockhead!! Why didn’t you just tell her that you went there to see her?!’

‘Well..... I couldn’t..... ‘cause we aren’t exactly friends ...she’d think it’s strange.’

We spent the rest of our time consulting about how to befriend the girl. By the time Mum nagged me off his bed, we had agreed that Brother should present her a worthy present.

Several weeks later on a Sunday, Brother and I headed for the street jewelers along the city cannel. By then he had saved more than six yuan from
his lunch money, together with the ten cents bills and coins of all sizes he had gradually sneak ed out of Mum's purse, he had almost ten yuan in his pocket.

The street jewelers along the city canal laid their colorful temptations of glass bracelets, shell necklaces and plastic rings on a simple fold-up wooden table. Their most valuable goods, jewelry made of shell based pearls — not real ones but the type that was made from polished shell covered with a layer of 'pearl powder', so they looked real — was kept in a wooden box with a transparent glass lid.

My eyes lingered among the big bright coloured plastic jewels while Brother's went straight for the box of pearls.

'Do you think she'll like this?' He pointed to a necklace made of white pearls.

It was a beautiful necklace, made to fit just around the neck. A string of big pea sized white pearls surrounded by a ring of tiny rice grain sized ones. This string of smooth white radiance was the most beautiful, most luxurious thing I had ever seen.

'Of course she will! Who wouldn't? I turned to the jeweler, 'Can I try it?'

'Little kid, this thing is going to cost you ten yuan! Do you have the money?! If you got the money, I'll let you try it, otherwise, go play somewhere else!' The jeweler answered with his chin up high and eye lids down, his little rat eyes peering at me with contempt.

'My Brother has got money, show him bro!'

The necklace felt cold and heavy around my neck, and I felt like a true princess. I begged my Brother to let me wear it home but he firmly refused. He had the jeweler wrap it carefully in a red silk packet. And with the gentleness and care rarely seen in my Brother, he placed it in his chest pocket near his heart.

Monday after school I was anxious to know whether the precious gift had finally knocked open the girl's heart.

She didn't show up. I don't know what happened to her,' my Brother told me.

I faced another let down the following day.
She must be really ill, she’s absent again.

Brother was more disappointed than I was; he kept feeling the weight of the red silk packet that carried the warmth from his body.

A week went by and she never showed up in class. I gradually lost interest and went on with my own business. I did not notice that Brother talked less and less at home and spent long hours staring into space.

One gloomy Sunday afternoon, Brother suddenly offered to take me to Jingxu Park.

‘Why go to a park today?! Look at how dark it is – we’re gonna get rained on!’ I complained.

‘Let’s just go, it won’t rain.’ Brother opened the door and headed out.

I followed. It was hard to resist a trip to the park, even on a windy, cloudy day.

Brother didn’t say a word on the way. He didn’t let me play at the playground in the park either. I complained loudly but he didn’t seem to hear me. Dazed, he stared into space, like a wooden statue.

He walked me to the lake in the park. The water was dark green like thickened ink, its edge was sprinkled with bits of white foam, plastic bags and yellow cigarette buds. He sat at the bank for a long while and then suddenly tossed a heavy red packet into the middle of the lake. It made a little splash and rings of ripples spread from the centre and soon disappeared.

‘Why did you do that? Are you out of your mind??’ It cost you ten Yuan!! ‘I wanted to dive into the water and retrieve it.

She drowned.’ Brother’s voice was quiet... and cold. She wanted a violin and her Mum wouldn’t buy it for her. She drowned herself here in this lake.

I stared at the dark water, which suddenly looked threatening, terrifying. The splashing at the edges was like thousands of little black hands grabbing and pulling at anything that dared to come close. The centre of the lake was an ominous calmness capable of swallowing a life.
I asked about Brother when I talked with Mum on the phone last night. I haven’t called him myself since last spring. Life has put us on such different tracks that we can no longer find a meeting point.

‘He is still living with Liu Shan. I think they are alright.’ Mum told me, ‘I urged them to get married, but he says that he wants to find someone younger still. I think Liu Shan is good for your Brother, but he doesn’t think so. He still goes on line and dates twenty year olds, some even younger. Ay, there’s nothing I can do….might as well just let him do what he wants.’

Liu Shan was the third women my Brother had found on line. The usual deal is that the woman moves in with him and he gives her housing and a monthly allowance of three thousand Yuan per month. He’ll be forty years old next year, but Mum and Dad still haven’t given up hope that he’ll get married one day.

When I do see him, I sometimes look at this man with swollen glassy eyes and remember what happened, but I can no longer find that bright-eyed boy with a face red like a ripened peach, who gently laid a pearl necklace next to his heart.
Xiu was my neighbour when I was a child. She was six years older than me, but she was the only girl playmate I had before I went to school. I called her Sister Xiu.

Right in front of my house was a basketball court. Every morning after I got dressed, I rushed out of the front door to the playground where I always saw Sister Xiu washing her family's clothes, shoes or blankets at the water faucet. She was like a housemaid in her family. Her mother sold clothes from early morning till late afternoon and her father was a teacher. Though she has a younger brother who was supposed to give a hand, she never received the favour. Her brother showed more intelligence than she and always got first prize at school, which pleased her father so much that he spared her brother all the housework.

With soap bubbles reflecting rainbows, she scrubbed and scrunched. With running water swooshing, she brushed and bleached.

Sister Xiu, I called out sonorously. I was always happy to see her.

She raised her head at the sound and her face spread a delighted smile. 'Ting, you are an early bird,' she often said.

After breakfast, I went out to help Sister Xiu hang the clothes on the beam of the basketball stands when she finished the washing. After that, we sat close to each other under the stand to chat or exchange our secrets. I noticed that her hands were whiter because of staying in water for too long. The skin on the finger tips wrinkled, and the nails turned transparent.

On a weekend morning, when we were chatting as usual, the boy who lived upstairs returned from shopping with his mother. He was wearing a pair of brand new sport shoes that shined in the sun. He raised and turned over his foot to check the sole every a few steps as if worrying that the clean shoes would get dirty.
Sister Xiu stared at his shoes for a while, and whispered to me with one hand half covering her mouth: ‘What a neatness freak to worry about the soles! He thinks his shoes are awesome, huh? Who cares?’

A little confused, I looked at her feet. She was wearing a pair of the most common plastic slippers which were designed for adult, with white thread holding together the torn part. I could not remember how long she had been wearing the slippers. She had only one pair of sport shoes which she washed every week and the flower patterns on it had already worn away. I recalled that the year before that, her strict father hadn’t bought her new shoes for Spring Festival, as a punishment for failing exams.

Then I understood: the new shoes reminded her of being hurt. Though I didn’t like her tone—— which I later found out was called ‘sarcasm’; I never showed off my shoes in front of her.

Several years passed and I was in Grade One in primary school. One day, when I was skipping home humming ‘the Little Swallow’, I heard conflict noises from Sister Xiu’s house.

Whip! Splaa! Pang! It sounded like a fire had broken out!

Terrified, I rushed back home. My hands might be trembling when I struggled to open the door, because the key stuck and the lock refused to turn.

The noise suddenly stopped.

Seconds later, I heard a scream!

I withdrew the key from the hole and turned around. Xiu’s father ran out of the house panic-stricken, nudging Xiu with his left arm around her shoulders. Then I saw something red dripping from Xiu’s elbow. Blood!! Xiu’s elbow exposed the white flesh. The blood fell onto the ground and marked a track!

I stood, petrifed.

Adult neighbors came out of their houses one by one. Some bent down to check the blood stains as if they suspected it was just red paint. Some formed pairs and began to ‘nibble each other’s ears’. Some ran into Xiu’s house to appreciate the havoc. Some just stayed in their balcony and watched the ongoing novelty.

Mother returned from work and brought a news update.
Xiu stole old Mr. Pan’s golden watch. (Mr. Pan was another neighbor.) Mr. Pan’s daughter sent him the watch as a birthday gift. He put it on a desk at the window. The window was open. Xiu took it. The watch was found under Xiu’s bed. She got a fine beating from her father.

Such a young girl. What a pity that she becomes a thief. ’Mom sighed.
‘Ting, you must keep away from her.’ Dad warned me.

From then on, Xiu became well-known in the neighborhood for the theft. And Mr. Pan was well-known for his golden watch and his filial and promising daughter. Xiu laughed less and less. From her eyes, flowed sadness as deep as the water in a well. Whenever she did anything improper, she received yelling and harsh words from her parents.

‘How shameful you are!’ They were very ready to say.
She still did all the washing at the water faucet, still smiled to me when I came over to her. We still sat together under the basketball stand after hanging the clean clothes. But something between us was missing. Later I found out what it was. But Xiu had received another irrecoverable wound, from me.

The old houses in the neighborhood were demolished for reconstruction. Before the reconstruction was underway, my brother and I liked to wander in the ruins, searching gold in a desert. We never found gold, we did come across things that we could play with.

‘Look what I found!’ I cried out.
‘Ink and a brush pen! We’ve got antiques!’ Brother was also excited.
We only knew that ancient people wrote with a brush pen and black ink, but we never saw these things in real life.

An irrational whim came into my mind that I wanted to try the ink and pen on a neighbor’s door. And so I did. I weaved curly lines, wrote pinyin letters, and outlined a bird on the door. Last of all, I signed my name.

What a fantastic experience to write like an ancient scholar! I abandoned myself in the joy so wildly that I didn’t think of the consequences.

The next day when we were eating breakfast, the very owner of the door stormed into my house. Her face was stern and stiff. She stepped into the
house without knocking and inquired: 'Ting! Who wrote that nonsense on my door?'

I was struck, as if an electric shock shot through my whole body. I looked up to her eyes and only saw the flame of anger. I turned to my parents for help, they were shocked and bewildered. I turned to my brother, his eyes showed blank emotions and he was just as helpless as me.

Who did it?!' she demanded. Her face turned whiter and whiter.

I should admit it. I was supposed to admit it. I was willing to admit it. But I was just too scared to admit it. What would she do to me? What would Mom and Dad do to me? My mind kept whirling and whirling. What shall I do? What shall I do? What shall I do?

I didn't know how long it took me to think, but I almost gathered up enough strength and courage to say 'It was me' when, she gnarled her teeth as a wolf, and shed killers' light in her eyes: 'If I found out who did it, I swear I will have him lick the marks clean!'

Hearing this, the courage and strength I had gathered vanished in a moment. My body grew weak and I slipped off my chair and squatted on the floor.

'I don't know.' I said desperately. My tears welled up in my eyes.

'Your name is on it. If you don't know, who will know?'

'If you know who did it, just tell this aunt, alright?' Mother seemed confident that it was not me. I was a good girl in most people's eyes, polite, timid, and bright.

I didn't speak for a long time, just sobbed quietly. The wolf refused to sit, refused to leave. She just stood beside me. It seemed that she would wait forever for me to speak her name.

'X...Xi...Xiu.' The name came out. The sin that haunted me finally began. She heard it, and promptly strode out of the door.

That day was June 1st, Children's Day. That morning, senior students tied the red scarf around my neck. I raised my fist above my head and swore the young pioneer oath.

It rained, the heaven cried.

After lunch, the rain had stopped and it was sunny. I sat on a chair in the corridor and buried my head in a book. The shadow of a passerby cast on my
book. I raised my head and met Sister Xiu's eyes, lifeless eyes. She was holding a basin of black water with the reflection of the sun, and a piece of rag stained with black ink. I heard a cold voice: 'Ting, I didn't do it.'

Again, I didn't know how to answer. I didn't even apologize. I watched her back when she went away. Clearly on her left elbow was a big scar. But the scar I left on her heart was even bigger, even deeper. Nobody could seal it up.

Several months later, Xiu's father got transferred and Xiu's family moved away. I never saw her again. Maybe it was my guilty conscience that prevented me from looking level into her eyes. Maybe she hated me and avoided meeting me. My memory of the things that happened between Xiu and me after that was totally blank.

This memory has been buried deep in my heart for so many years. Having it dug out, I find that I cannot forgive myself. I realized that I was a thief, I stole her trust.

I am going to look for her online to see how her life is going, because I don't want to live in a life sentence. My guilt is going to be ended.

---

From: Chen Yuting@qq.com  
Send: February 8, 2010 (Monday): 9:32 p.m.  
To: I love Freedom@qq.com  
Subject: A belated letter from a guilty person

Dear sister Xiu,

I am your old neighbor Ting, the Ting in Shatian. It's a long time since we last saw each other—that was before you and your family moved downtown.

You may be surprised to hear from me but I have long been considering writing to you. I'm writing to say, I AM SORRY!

Sister Xiu, do you still remember, back in Shatian, you were once made to wash the black ink stains on Mrs Luo's door while you hadn't done anything wrong?
That's all because of me! It was me who wrote on her door; It was me who signed my name; and it was, again, me who told Mrs Luo that it was you.

I felt so terrible when I said your name; I felt even more terrible when you passed by me after you washed the ink stains; And I have always been feeling terrible whenever I recalled what I had done to you.

We all made mistakes when young, but the blunder I made was a sin that has haunted me for years. I hurt you badly. I feel remorseful. But I don't know what I could do to heal your wound.

Filled with regret, I am asking you to accept my sincere apology. Please forgive me!

Wish you a happy New Year! And very best of you and your family!

Sincerely yours,
Ting

RE: A belated letter from a guilty person
From: I love Freedom@qq.com
Send: February 23, 2010 (Friday): 4:41 a.m.
To: Chen Yuting@qq.com

Dear Ting,

I feel excitedly surprised by your letter! How do you get my email address?

To be frank, I have totally forgotten the case you mentioned. Really. I don't remember it. It was more than ten years ago!

......

OK, maybe I can recall it. But I didn't blame you because you were so young at that time. We make mistakes, right?

......

I won't blame you. You know, we are old folks at home. Call me anytime. Here is my number:136*******

Best wishes,
Sister Xiu
As I grew up year by year, bearing the secret in heart, I had blamed myself from time to time when I encounter cases reminiscent of the early sin. However, I have never tried to do anything about it because I always think that when a relationship is broken it can never be mended.

After I wrote the first part of this writing, I determined to tell Sister Xiu the truth. I felt nervous when writing the letter, but relieved after receiving the reply. Wrongdoings and pain may be inevitable, but we've got to learn to apologize and forgive. Or the guilt will never be ended.
A Study Night

Dogs chat
Cars laugh
Everybody sleeps,
The street light waits
For something hidden

Keyboard dances,
branches vacantly stare
at a pile of books
they are now close friends, look!
Dim.
Walking a long way in the dream.
into the blue sea,
mulberry fields I see,
Future and the past I see.
(蒼海桑田)

1 'Capricious world'
The experience of \textit{déjà vu} is usually accompanied by a compelling sense of familiarity, and also a sense of 'eeriness,' 'strangeness,' 'weirdness,' or what Sigmund Freud and other psychologists call 'the uncanny.' The 'previous' experience is most frequently attributed to a dream, although in some cases there is a firm sense that the experience has genuinely happened in the past.

It is common among adults and children alike.
My mom likes to make plans for me. Well, to some extent, she likes to make plans for every aspect of my life and even some tiny details would not slip through her fingers. Yesterday she told me on the phone that she had thought of names for my future son and unborn grandson. ‘Your son should be named Tu Da Hai (涂大海) and your grandson should be named Tu Xiao Hai (涂小海),’ she said in a serious voice: ‘And you’d better have a boy, or I am going to kick you out of my house.’ Through her voice I could feel that this command, which is similar to other millions of commands she gave me, is not negotiable.

Looking back into my childhood, I find that the most frequent sentence I hear is ‘You’d better do … or I will…’ which surely comes from one person none other than my Mom.

Every morning with the twittering of birds at dawn and the sight of the rising sun glinting on trees, I got up due to a death threat: ‘You’d better get up now, or I will throw you downstairs.’

The second threat came without hesitation: ‘You’d better have your breakfast quickly, or I will not cook for you anymore!’

Death threats came from my mom’s mouth just like the bullets fired one by one from the machine gun:

‘You’d better come home from school before 12:15, or I will never let you step into my house!’

‘You’d better learn English for one hour at noon, or I’ll knock your block off!’

‘You’d better finish all your homework before you sleep, or you will not be able to see the sunlight of tomorrow!’

Three weeks ago, I lent my cell phone to my friend. He happened to be a master of practical jokes. So when he received a text message sent by my mom asking me what I was doing, he replied:
Leave me alone! I am dating a girl.

From the time when I could distinguish female from male, mother tried to convince me that I should not touch the hands of a girl before thirty-five years old, letting alone dating one of them! When I was an innocent young boy who became curious about the opposite sex, she frightened me by saying that the skin of the young girls was ‘poisonous’ to boys.

‘But Mom, why didn’t those heroes died of poisoning by kissing their heroines in the film?’ I remembered I asked her after I watched the film ‘Titanic’.

‘That’s because they have grown up and are strong enough to be immune to the poisonous skin of women.’

But then I grew up and knew about the truth, she still forbade me to get close to a girl, and she would ask my teacher for changing my seat if my desk mate happened to be a schoolgirl.

‘You’d better get away from those girls,’ she warned me: ‘And if you dare to walk with a girl in the street, you will see the consequence soon.’ Her eyes were gleamed coldly.

‘You’d better marry a woman who came from a literary family and strong economic back ground, and it is better if she is a southerner, two years younger than you, not too fat and not too thin, no love experiences……’

Well, now you could understand the rage of my mom the time she saw the text message sent by my friend. At first she tried to call me, but unfortunately my friend shut down the cell phone which meant the last straw to her.

Within minutes all my family was informed that Steed has been dating with a female for more than at least one hour; and what was worse, He shut down his cell phone which meant he might have touched the hand of that girl, or even more serious, kissing.’

Unfortunately, there was no flight to Zhuhai that evening, my mother was furious as she stood alone inside the terminal building in a cold night, unable to go anywhere, while her son, her meek son, was kissing a strange girl.
It was fortunate that my father came to fetch her in time before the anger totally overthrew her sense. My mom was in rage and was immersed herself in imagining the terrible scene of her son pressing his lip to soft female lips in dark woods. I was taking a pleasant bath in my dormitory, humming Songs for Singles (单身情歌) while rhythmically scrubbing my body with the towel, totally unaware that thousand miles away stood my dear furious mom in the cold dark airport.

It was not until my friend gave me back the cell phone two hours later, saying ‘It was out of power so I shut it down’ with a grin on his face, did I realized how serious the situation was and what terrible things could have happen during the past four hours.

‘By the way,’ he said with a crafty smirk: ‘I told your mother you were dating when she sent a message asking what you were doing.’

With hands shaking and my whole body trembling, I dialed the phone of my mom. I gasped when the call went through which meant the volcanic eruption of my mom’s anger was around the corner. From the other side of the phone came a rapid dreadful breathing sound which meant her fury was at the point of explosion and would come in no time like an endless stream, an unstoppable flood. And I could feel she swirled her tongue slightly which was always an omen of a violent storm.

At precisely that moment, with my heart pounding fast and my fist clenching and my feet trembling uncontrollably and my face screwing up and my back soaking with cold sweat, with my mind filling with fear and fully preparation of the coming of the storm, a strange warm feeling mingled with pieces of memories flashed across my heart.

I saw she was shouting at me ‘Get up now! Or I will throw you downstairs!’ while giving me my washed cleaned clothes which were still smeared with dust last night.

I saw she cried for me to have my dinner quickly or she would not cook for me anymore at the same time when she passed me delicious buns and a bowl of rice gruel which was cooked by her at least one hour before I woke up.
I saw she warned me constantly to back home on time to have lunch prepared by her for the whole morning.

I saw she threatened me that she would punish me severely if I didn’t finish my homework before sleep, and when I opened my exercise book next morning, finding handwritings on my composition of correcting mistakes and giving some suggestions of improvement.

I saw countless times she threw dirty words at me and shouted to me with that familiar sentence ‘You’d better…or I will…’, threatening me while at the same time or the times I could not see, doing things for me, helping me as best as she can.

She swallowed, but still, she did not speak. She was waiting.

Suddenly the fear melted, dissolving into nothing, and the hatred oozed out of my body like perspiration. A strong warm flow enveloped me which made my eyes moistened, my fist unclenching, and my heart stop beating fast.

After all, she was my Mom, no matter how conservative or hypersensitive or fractious she was.

I’d better accept her, or there is no one else waiting for me, comforting me and supporting me when I was hurt or in trouble.

Tears crawled down my cheek as I broke the silence. I spoke to her with softest and sweetest voice I had ever been able to utter:

‘Hi, Mom, I think Tu Da Hai(涂大海) is an excellent name for my future son.’
I never really felt close to Uncle Tiejian, my oldest Uncle on my mother's side. For one thing, I do not remember him ever smiling at me when I met him in 1971 for the first time. For another, he never initiated any conversation with me, nor did he ever show much affection.

It took me many years to learn that he did not have much any reason to smile, and he did not know much about affection. In fact, the name Grandpa gave him prepared him for such a life, as *tie* literally means 'iron' and *jian* 'hard' in Chinese. The name came from the story of his extraordinary birth in 1925 in Hengshan county, Hunan Province. There was no sign of his coming out fourteen months after he was conceived, and rumors started to circulate that my Grandma was bearing a strange creature. A reputable local doctor of Chinese medicine assured Grandma that everything was going to be just fine. He said if it turned out to be a boy, he would marry his new-born daughter to him. A few days later, Uncle Tiejian arrived, the picture of a perfect baby. Grandpa was so happy with his first born that he gave him that name, believing his son would be enduring and strong-minded.

Uncle Tiejian was certainly strong-minded. After graduating from Hunan University in Changsha, the provincial capital of Hunan Province, he went back to Hengshan where his parents were. However, he made it clear that he would not marry Guixian, the daughter of the Chinese medical doctor, whom he barely knew. He had fallen in love with a girl from his university. He pleaded with Grandpa again and again, making it clear that he would marry nobody else. Grandpa was a very open-minded person, but he drew a line when it came to the marriage of his children.

As a result, Grandpa ignored Uncle Tiejian's pleading, saying that young people had no idea of what life and marriage were about, and that the choice of the parents was the most sensible. Uncle Tiejian responded to such parental tyranny by threatening to become a monk, only to be rejected by the monastery because Grandpa interfered. Uncle Tiejian finally resorted to suicide.
If not for a passer-by, who saw him jumping into a river, Grandpa would have lost his oldest son in middle age.

Grandpa was so shaken by the suicide that he yielded. Consequently, Uncle Tiejian was able to announce his engagement to his beloved woman. However, Grandpa made sure that Uncle Tiejian's sweetheart, who lived in a town forty km away, was not there to receive the engagement ring. In fact, Uncle Tiejian could hardly see his lover after the engagement. At a time when there was no telephone, let alone other ways of communication, Uncle Tiejian's passion was reduced to despair as time went by.

Uncle Tiejian was born at a time when feudalism prevailed. Disobeying the father was a sin. Going against the wishes of Grandpa and the Chinese medical doctor, both of whom were considered to be local celebrities, would be a further disgrace to the family. No matter how stubborn Uncle Tiejian was, he was overpowered by the tradition of the time, and eventually found himself entering the arranged marriage.

Fortunately, strict as the parental rule was, things in the bedroom were beyond its control. Uncle Tiejian did try to learn to love Guixian, a woman of strong character and self-esteem, but soon it was clear that they simply could not live under the same roof. Uncle Tiejian started to resist in his own way. If she slept in one bedroom, he would lie down in another; if she came toward him, he would walk away before she was near enough. He patiently yet determinedly let seven years go by like this, slowly reducing the parents of the two families into such disappointment and rage that they dismissed the nonexistent marriage.

Uncle Tiejian was a mere name for me before 1971 when Mum took me with her to visit him and Grandpa in Hengshan. It was my second trip away from our home in Guangzhou. Though life in Guangzhou was not that desirable at the time, it was still much better than that in Hengshan, where Grandpa and Uncle Tiejian worked in the field. I was eight years old and could not possibly understand what the trip was about. I left Hengshan with the memory of Grandpa being bald and of him asking me questions that I could not answer in the incomprehensible Hengshan dialect, of Uncle Tiejian having a straight face that made me feel that I was not welcome there.
It was years later that Mum told me that Uncle Tiejian had given up a better life in the city so that all his six brothers and sisters could live in the cities to which they were assigned jobs after leaving university, at a time when the Chinese government paid for higher education as well as assigning jobs.

Uncle Tiejian took it for granted that he was to look after his parents in their old age. Before 1949, which marked the founding of the People's Republic of China, Grandpa was a very rich man in the Hengshan area. In spite of the fact that he gave away his property to the Communist Party after 1949 and became its supporter, and that Uncle Tiejian was subsequently classified as an 'educable offspring', in the political jargon of the time, Uncle Tiejian did not make it through the frequent political movements between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s. The fact that the family had been rich was enough for him to be named an 'anti-revolutionary', and sent to the countryside to be 're-educated' and 'transformed', all of which were frequently used labels that were hardly defined and did not need justification in the midst of political chaos. Such was his inescapable fate at the time. All of a sudden, every one and any one could insult and spit at this once enviable, privileged oldest son of a rich family.

It is hard to imagine how Uncle Tiejian, as strong-minded as he was, pulled through the decade-long suffering. It was said that during that period of time, he married a woman who brought with her three children from her previous marriage. However, he asked for divorce in no time, as the spiteful woman invented to the Hengshan government a story of his attempting to burn down the highest building in the capital of Changsha. As an 'anti-revolutionary', Uncle Tiejian could not in his wildest dreams hope to be given a chance to clear his name. It was also reported that Uncle Tiejian, though leading a marginal life, managed to pay to have Grandpa and Grandma, who died one after the other in 1970 and 1975, carried to a nearby mountain and buried together. He then lived on, lonelier than ever. He must have learned to accept things as they were, otherwise he would not have survived.

However, Uncle Tiejian did not swallow his misery without protest. Just as he defied the unwanted marriage, the unyielding character in him challenged ill fortune in his special way: he attempted suicide three times. The first time he gulped down a liquid with high percentage of alcohol. It was not
strong enough to bring him the end but burned in his stomach so fiercely that in the dilemma of 'to be or not to be', he had himself rushed to the hospital.

The second attempt was no more scientific: he devoured a dozen nails and a bunch of match heads. The strange mixture swirled in his stomach, making sure he that suffered soberly without coming near death. He lived to make another attempt, and as soon as he collected enough sleeping pills, he devoured them. Just as he was flirting with death, someone found him and rushed him to the hospital. The inadequately trained doctors in the poorly equipped hospital did not usually have much to offer to patients, but were unusually good at giving life back to those who did not want to live. As a result, Uncle Tiejian came back to his misery, and somehow chose to live on.

Then a stray dog came to his life. One day, this starving creature, hair missing in parts of his bony body, so dirty that his hair color was unrecognizable, stood in front of Uncle Tiejian's creaky door and looked him straight in the eye, his eyes radiating a kind of warmth that had long been absent in Uncle Tiejian's life. Uncle Tiejian let the dog into the hut that was in no better condition than the dog himself, and gave the dog a share of his dinner. The hungry dog gulped down everything in a matter of seconds, then gratefully leaned against him, wagging his tail with gratitude, inviting attention.

The story of the dog was the only thing Uncle Tiejian ever told me, when he came to help our family when my father was very sick and my son was just born. He said that the dog was the only living thing that bothered to stop by his door in most difficult ten years of his life. He had cut any contact with his brothers and sisters in order not to involve them in the situation he was in, and lived in a world of self-inflicted loneliness.

I saw Uncle Tiejian again when he visited us in Guangzhou in 1973. The trip was made possible through the collective effort of the brothers and sisters whom he had protected. They put together the little money they could spare, as soon as the political climate became slightly better. I had never met those five uncles and one aunt before, because the decade or so before 1973 was a time when the country suffered immensely and the average person had no money to travel anywhere. First there was the famine between 1958 and 1962, followed by a slow recovery which saw me born in 1963, then there was the Cultural Revolution that lasted from 1966 to 1976. Mum was the only one
in the family working in higher education which was mostly demobilized during the Cultural Revolution. She decided to take the risk of hosting Uncle Tiejian as she felt that her 'clean' political record in Sun Yat-sen University where she worked would keep her out of trouble, since her 'anti-revolutionary' brother was going to be there for only a brief reunion.

When I set eyes on Uncle Tiejian for the second time, I saw the same peasant in rugged clothes, dull and passive, reflecting no trace of the education he had had. He wore a hat that had been so exposed to the weather that it had become more white than blue. His jacket was the same color, and threads of varied lengths hung from the worn collar and cuffs. His thick lips scarcely opened to smile or speak. He and I never really exchanged any words except _hello and good-bye_, while most of the conversations he had with Mum were held behind a closed door in very low voice, always with Mum coming out of the room red-eyed.

We did not hear anything about Uncle Tiejian again until the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time, he started writing to Mum, informing her of his impending rehabilitation from the 'anti-revolutionary' label. He soon wrote again, telling her that more than half of his life had become a messy story because he was given a report that he was, after all, never officially regarded as an 'anti-revolutionary'; therefore, there was no need for rehabilitation. A few sentences lifted Uncle Tiejian up from the condemned life and snapped away more than a decade of his very best years. The only compensation for all this was the payback of the salary which he was deprived of for years. That sum of money did not mean much in a big city, but was almost astronomical in the small county of Hengshan.

Instantly, dozens of daughters from poor families came to Uncle Tiejian's door and drowned him with warmth and sweet words, none of them failing to make it plain that they wanted to be adopted so that they could take care of him. Uncle Tiejian, who had known little love from women, lost his head immediately and soon lost his judgment. He adopted one daughter within a short time, and naturally fell in love with her despite the father-daughter relationship and her marriage. The probably one-sided love affair ended with the interference of the outraged husband, so did the adoption.
He adopted another daughter shortly afterwards, looking to her to take care of him when he got old, only to be disappointed when she turned away from him as soon as they finished the legal procedure -- she was only interested in inheriting his money.

Once in a while, I would hear that Uncle Tiejian wrote to some woman, but nothing ever came out of it. In the meantime, his social status started to rise, though slowly. He was, after all, one of the few well-educated people in the community. He was elected to be a people's representative for the county to voice opinions about issues of interest. Such small fame was for him a big political as well as spiritual liberation. He often wrote to tell Mum what he was doing and where he was traveling while performing as a county representative. His handwriting went deep into the paper, as if each character bore the burden of his past suffering. He never used any punctuation. As a result, reading his letter meant constantly getting out of breath.

Before long, Uncle Tiejian visited us again. In contrast to the first visit, he was now glowing with good health. He did not at all look his sixysomething age, probably the only good thing that came out of years of physical labor. It was then that I found that Uncle Tiejian could tell good stories and laugh heartily if he chose to. He had us all rolling on the floor when he recalled the time when he and his brothers and sisters built a little hut in the huge garden in the family estate, and ran to it for shelter from the house when it rained cats and dogs, only to be drenched to the skin. Engrossed in the memory, he moved his arms rapidly as he told the story, punctuating his sentences with fits of laughter, his face red with excitement, his mouth wide open showing the gap of a missing upper tooth.

At the end of his visit, he announced that since he had no family, he could be at any of the brothers' or sisters' disposal whenever they needed him.

A few months later, my father became critically ill. In the meantime I gave birth to my son. Mum could not possibly handle all the work on her own and sought help from Uncle Tiejian, who came the moment he heard the story. However, having led a solitary rural life of poor hygiene for a long time, he was incapable of looking after the sick and had no idea of personal hygiene in taking care of a patient. A better job for him was to take my son out for walks. Childless all his life, Uncle Tiejian was literally ignorant of anything about child
care. Holding the baby in his arms, he walked through the neighborhood, wearing no expression. My friends commented that he was certainly very reliable, but knew nothing about interacting with the baby. I listened with mixed feelings, torn by sadness and sorrow.

Uncle Tiejian was extremely frugal. I was one day shocked to find him eating half a loaf of bread soon after he settled with us -- it was the bread he had not finished on his train ride to Guangzhou a week before. He said he had put it away and forgotten it. I pointed out that it was very unhealthy to eat stale bread. Uncle Tiejian gave me a critical look, and said that I had no idea how, during the time of the famine in the early 1960s, people would fight for something like that.

‘But times have changed,’ I said.

‘So?’ Uncle Tiejian’s eyes widened, his body tense, ready to protect the bread if I were to take it away.

We used to offer to buy him things, but he refused to accept anything, almost always turning a good-willed proposal into an argument by insisting that he needed nothing. Yet he would bring things back every time after he went out to dump garbage. He would be gone for much longer than needed, and inevitably came back with some old stuff that people had thrown away. Ignoring our frowns and effort of telling him how dirty and useless those things were, he would wash them, and use them. One of the things he brought back was a pair of shoes, which turned out to be in better shape than the ones he had been wearing. For him, making use of unwanted things was a joy, spending money a sin.

Though scarcely able to show affection to us, Uncle Tiejian related very well to strangers. A fan of traditional Chinese medicine, he had read numerous books by practitioners. Strangely enough, those suffering from chronic diseases and unaccountable pain would report great relief of the symptoms or the healing of their ailments, after Uncle Tiejian foot-massaged them. Initially, his patients were friends of my parents, then friends and relatives of those beneficiaries would flock to our home. He would hold their feet in his hands, and massage with such intent expression and such confidence, his back arching with effort, his body moving up and down as he attended to various parts of
the feet, that I wondered whether the healing effect was more from people’s
determination to reward his effort than the actual effect of the treatment.

All the ex-patients poured words of praise and flattery over him,
especially after he repeatedly rejected payment of any kind. He would describe
his patients’ recovery to us vividly, eyes shining, face glowing with exhilaration.
Curiously, his liveliness tended to make me feel more sad than happy: he was
never properly recognized by others. Even then, his happiness was built on
making others happy, and there was always the question of who would take
care of him if he were in need.

I saw Uncle Tiejian twice in the next few years. It struck me one day
that he had aged a lot, and that he had lost quite a bit of weight. He would
often fall asleep over a book. When I asked him whether he was okay, he said
that he was in perfect shape, which brought back my memory of the strong
and healthy Uncle Tiejian. For the next few years, in spite of offers from his
siblings for him to live with them, Uncle Tiejian stayed in Hengshan county,
where he felt he belonged.

Until the day I heard of his death, it never occurred to me that death
had anything to do with him. Mum told me that he died of loneliness, in
hunger and in the cold, as well as from the malnutrition caused by the austere
way of life the long years of hardship programmed him into. He did not make
a fire for the bitter winter, and had lain in bed in scant clothing for several days,
without any food, too frail to go out and asked neighbors for help. When my
aunt, who lived in the same town, rushed to the hospital where he had been
taken to by a friend, he was more dead than alive, too weak to breathe a word.

All his brothers and sisters and some of their children went from all
over China to say their final good-byes to him. There is a Chinese saying to the
effect that the oldest son is like the father of the family. Uncle Tiejian had
reduced himself to loneliness to prevent his brothers and sisters from getting
into political trouble. Now all they could do was to make sure that they were
there for him, though it was too late. They laid his ashes, according to his will,
beside those of their parents.

After all the misery and loneliness, Uncle Tiejian was finally reunited
with his parents, whose warmth must have sustained him and to whose
support he must have turned to a million times throughout his lonely life. Now
he could be their little boy again, and bathe in the love and protection that he had needed so badly. In retrospect, I wonder whether he had delayed his birth because he anticipated the lifelong hardship.

I was in the United States when I heard about Uncle Tiejian’s death in December 1995. I wrote an account in Chinese, from which this current story evolved, in memory of him. It was passed to all of his relatives who told me many things about him that I did not know. A little more than a year later, shortly after I returned home, my third Uncle, Uncle Renfeng, paid me a visit from Beijing. He told me that Uncle Tiejian had shared with him something very intimate. These two brothers always had a special bond, as Uncle Renfeng agreed to marry Uncle Tiejian’s ex-wife Guixian in order to get him out of the misery of being with a woman he did not love, and to make peace with Guixian’s family, who threatened to make trouble if their daughter was simply dumped after seven years of marriage.

According to Uncle Renfeng, Uncle Tiejian had been seeing a woman, who he knew from childhood, on and off for several decades. During the Cultural Revolution, she had to go to Xinjiang, a northwestern autonomous region, with her husband as a punishment for political reasons. She went back to their hometown every seven or eight years, and met Uncle Tiejian, very occasionally and very gingerly. It was not until he was no longer an anti-revolutionary and until her husband died that they became lovers in every sense — just once. Then she had to go back to Xinjiang to take care of her grandson for a couple of years. She had asked him to wait for her. But he ran out of time.

It was comforting to know that Uncle Tiejian had not been that lonely after all. That night, I dreamed. The woman from Xinjiang came to visit us. In a roundabout way, she asked whether Uncle Tiejian had left behind anything significant. She hastened to explain that all she wanted was some token to remember him by. Sensing that there was more than just that, I gave her a picture of Uncle Tiejian, and said that he would be very happy if he knew that someone outside the family cared so much about him. She took the picture, and burst into tears.

All of a sudden, I felt very grateful to the old woman. What she had given to Uncle Tiejian was probably the warmest thing he ever had. I searched
everywhere for something that had some relevance to Uncle Tiejian, and found a few more old photos of him. The old woman took them all as if they were gold.

Upon leaving, she left me a romantic and loving thought, by saying that she would place some of her photos on Uncle Tiejian’s grave and be there for him forever.

At long last, Uncle Tiejian could rest in peace, I remember thinking in my dream.
Merry Christmas, Mr. Love

Cyrus, Christmas is coming again. How is everything going? Guess whether it’s going to snow this Christmas Eve? I guess not. You must lose if you bet with me again, because I am in Zhuhai now, a place where it never snows. I miss that snowy night and miss you. And I miss that sentence: ‘Merry Christmas, My love.’

The first day I returned to school after summer vacation was the worst day of my life. I was late and got a scolding from my teacher. I left my homework at home and bumped into the door when I came in class. The newly transferred student teased me. Almost all bad things happened to me. The new student is Cyrus, my new desk mate.

Hi, I’m Cyrus, the new transferee. Nice to meet you.’ He said with a big smile when I sat on my chair. I looked at his face. He was not very handsome but he looked neat. His bright eyes made others felt relaxed to talk with him.

I’m Lena. Nice to meet you too.’ I replied in the clouds, because I felt embarrassed for that hit. And then Miss Liu, the teacher in charge of our class, came in and gave us an orientation speech.

‘You should lose weight to reduce your gravitational potential energy.’ He whispered.

Why?’ I couldn’t get his point.

‘More weight more inertia. You should reduce your weight lest you can’t stop and walk into the door next time.’ He said earnestly but with a tricky smile.

‘I’m just trying to learn to go through the wall!’ I gritted my teeth and gave him a stern look, but he just smiled slightly as if he had never said anything.

After that we often bickered but we gradually came to know each other.

Cyrus is a year older than me. His father is a businessman, so they moved a lot for her father’s work. Cyrus is good at basketball and guitar. As he
said, it can make a man more charming. But I told him that as a girl I prefer tennis and piano to basketball and guitar.

Cyrus looks like a frivolous guy. Actually, he just follows his feelings. He knows what he wants and what his dream is and studies hard for it.

I could feel that he treated me differently from the others, and I knew I liked him. But I didn't want to think too much about that. I was a bit afraid of love, because I was afraid of being hurt and separating. I didn't want to break this relationship. But I was too cautious, so cautious that the relationship never even matured to a point where his departure would be called 'the break up'.

The day before Christmas was a Saturday and he wanted to have a date with me.

'Would you like to see a film with me?' packing his school bag after class he asked me.

'Ok, I'd love to.' I answered. Then his friends called him to play basketball. So he answered them and packed several books into his bag carelessly.

'Well, you go to my home at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. Don't oversleep!' He said quickly. I really wanted to ask him why we need to meet at his home first, but I couldn't, he had disappeared at the door of our class.

The next day, I went to his home at ten o'clock.

'I remember I told you nine o'clock.' He said disgruntled.

'I remember you didn't listen to my reply for that sentence.' I answered without any apology.

'So where should we go to see the movie?' I asked.

'Here.' He answered rapidly.

'Here?' I asked, puzzled.

'Of course here.' He said naturally, 'On the TV.'

'Are you joking?' I stared at him with wide-open eyes, thinking that I must misheard his words.

'I bought a DVD and I want to see it today. Here.' He handed me a DVD and whispered, 'Didn't I tell you yesterday?'

'God...I totally have no idea what to say. 'You cheat!'

'OK OK. I'll take you to a real movie next time.' He said, a bit smug.
So I had to watch the so called movie with him at his home.

The film was named *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, directed by Nagisa Oshima. The film deals with the relationships among four men in a Japanese prisoner of war camp during the World War II. The plot is heavy, oppressive and cruel. I have to say it is a good film. At the end of the movie, Sergeant Hara, a camp commandant, will be executed. Lawrence, a prisoner four years earlier, visits him. Before Lawrence leaves, Hara said to him ‘Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence.’ It touches me deeply. I can feel the friendship between them and the other two men; maybe they also have some love. At that time, this kind of emotion is rare.

After watched this film, we went to have lunch.

‘Do you believe in love?’ he asked me suddenly.

‘Umm...In fact I do not know what true love is. Maybe...there are some people who have it, but I absolutely can’t meet him.’ I said slowly, thinking.

‘Why?’

‘No reason. I do not expect love.’ I didn’t want to say too much.

I was afraid of falling in love with someone, or anyone. My parents parted when I was six years old. My father fell in love with a woman and so began the never-ending quarrel between my parents. They got a divorce several months later. After a year my mom married again with a man who was also divorced. But I really didn’t feel the love between them. But I knew the love between my parents never came back.

After that love became my nightmare. I had lots of friends, but no lover. I didn’t believe in love. I was afraid of separation and hurt. I would rather be alone. I want a man to be with me forever. I don’t need fastlove.

‘So you don’t trust miracles?’ he asked.

‘Of course not.’ I answered.

Silence...

‘Guess whether it’s going to snow this Christmas Eve?’ He looked me and asked.

‘I guess...not.’ I looked up through the window and saw the blue sky. No clouds.
But I guess it will. He smiled. Let's bet on it.

Well, but what if you lose? I stared at him, smiled.

Um... if I lose I will do three things you want. He thought and said.

But if you lose, how about going out with me tomorrow?

' Aren't we going out now? I smiled.

I mean... like lovers. He looked deeply into my eyes.

'Ok. So be it, I answered, avoiding his eyes.

It was fine until 23 o'clock.

'Three things I want. Remember that!' I sent him a message.

'It also has half an hour from midnight.' He answered.

It was 23:45.

He sent me a message.

'Look out of the window.'

'It's boring. Give it up Cyrus.' I sent back.

'That is true! It is snowing now!' he wrote back rapidly.

I run to the balcony and looked up to the black sky. The sky was like a dark sheet, sprinkled with peals of snow. Yes, they were snowflakes, real snowflakes.

I could hardly believe my eyes. I watched the snow by the window and then my cell phone rang. It is Cyrus.

'So lucky! You should go to buy some lottery tickets.' I smiled.

'In fact I just heard weather forecast this morning.' He answered honestly.

'So where shall we go tomorrow?' I asked.

'How about the newest amusement park?' He said excitedly.

'You're kidding! It is winter now! We will become a pair of ice cubes after a ride on the Roller Coaster.' I grumbled.

'No. I think the Roller Coaster will be closed on a snowy day.' He smiled.

So, the following morning, Cyrus and I met at the amusement park.
He wore a pair of blue, washed-out jeans, a knee-length black coat, and a pair of brown ankle boots. A red wool scarf rapped around his neck. Looking back. The tip of his nose was a little red. But his eyes were bright and warm.

The Roller Coaster was closed as Cyrus said. But there are many Christmas activities and performances filled the amusement park with festive atmosphere. We watched parades and joined games. He put his long red scarf round our necks. We walked along the road, and went to the centre of the park. There was a huge Christmas tree as high as a five-story building. The tree was decorated with lights and Christmas ornaments. On the top of the tree, there was a big, bright star, like Cyrus’ smile.

’Merry Christmas, my love,’ he whispered in my ear.

The cold was melted in my heart. I looked into his eyes and felt my face burning. I didn’t know that was because of him or the cold weather.

’Merry Christmas, ’ I said with a smile.

’Give me a chance to start this love, OK?’ He asked carefully.

I just smiled and looked up at the top of the tree, a bright warm star. I knew we had started.

I knew I was afraid of love and he also knew that. But I wanted to believe him and believe in love once again.

The days I shared with him were so happy that I expected we would spend Christmas together several times.

And I never thought the separation was coming soon.

After the next summer holiday, we were grade 3 students in high school. And the next year we would take part in college entrance examination.

At the second Christmas he told me he will go to a Canadian university. I cried that day. I scolded him and accused him of being a liar. He just kept his head down and said nothing. I knew he wanted to say something, but I didn’t want to hear anything. At that time, I closed my ears totally.

At last he just said sorry and went away.

Neither of us mentioned that matter in the next few months. But both of us knew it announced the end of our days.

People say the first love always is accompanied by tears and hurt, it shouldn’t surprise me. But at that time I thought I was the only one who’s
been hurt. So I never thought of his feelings. After that I often thought whether I put myself in his shoes or at least tried to understand him maybe it would have been better.

The day he went to Canada I didn’t take him to the airport. He sent me a message, ‘Take care of yourself’.

I hid myself under my quilt. I remembered the days I shared with him over and over. I thought the song he sang for me. He learned to play piano after I told him I preferred piano to guitar. Both of us knew I didn’t really mean it, but he kept it in his mind. That day, he played piano and sang my love of Westlife for me. Though he didn’t play very well, I read seriousness in his eyes. He said that he wanted a serious relationship. But two weeks after he said that words, he told me he must leave here and leave me.

I began to keep a diary about him every day. I wrote down everything that happened between us. I wrote down how deeply I loved him and how he cheated me.

I thought I would go crazy. But after a month, I returned to normal.

Anything, whatever pain or sorrow, will be gone. It is the power of time.

The third Christmas I spent time alone. I watched Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence again. Then wrote him a letter and wrote the sentence ‘Merry Christmas, Mr. Love’ and then I tore up the letter.

We didn’t keep up with each other. Both of us know that the big problem is distance. We thought that if we couldn’t be together, love meant nothing. Love is not equal to marriage.

I know he went abroad not for me, not for anyone else, just for himself. I know he has his own dream and I also know that is his own choice. I no longer consider him a liar and I was the only victim. Both of us were hurt. So we have to be strong. I’m happy for him now, because I know he is doing what he wants.

I don’t think I’ll wait for him. I’ll just wait for my Mr. Right. But I will send him Merry Christmas ‘in my mind every year.
Cyrus, the 5th Christmas is coming and merry Christmas.
Merry Christmas, Mr. Love.
References to the experience of **déjà vu** are found in literature of the past, indicating it is not a new phenomenon.
Dreams

Young Hiu Ming Agnes

He walks into the new branch of the most popular CD shop. The shop means little to him, it is the location that is important. The most eye-catching position of the window was covered with grand posters of the newest and hottest female singer of the year—however, she is no longer as important to him as compared to the time that she was no one to the others.

This place was used to be a big restaurant with unreasonably few customers. Nevertheless, two regular customers would always be there having dinner at the same time. Yet, they were seated separately. The boy was always aware of the presence of the only other customer, a girl who always put her earphones on and had her meals unhurried. She did not notice him however, until one day when he told himself to be brave and sit beside this girl. With a slightly trembled voice he started off a conversation, ‘Hi, what kind of music are you listening to?’ Therefore, for the next thirty days, the two loyal customers shared their music, conversations, and laughter in the restaurant. For the next three hundred days, the pair started holding hands, dining out elsewhere. At first they shared their dreams with each other and now they indeed have the same dream, the same goal that they wanted to achieve—to work hard and save enough money to replace the restaurant where they had been dining not together and together for the past hundred days with their own CD shop.

The couples did not disappoint themselves. After another six hundred days of hard work their dream came true. It was also a good news for people living around the restaurant that they could have something new to look at and buy. For the first ninety days people were amused by the unique style of CDs they sell—classic and vintage CDs and CDs with music styles that not everyone would appreciate, with few best-selling or commercial CDs to match the public’s taste since those were the real music that they truly adored and cherished. Spending most of their time in the CD shop, they were not bored at all because they were just so in love with each other and their music. However, managing a business was difficult, it was not easy at all to side...
from the mainstream and still managed to win the customers’ hearts. It was at the time the couples started arguing over money and their ways of managing the business.

The couple owned half the company each. However, one day the girl said: I’m not going to stay here anymore. I need to get a job. The boy did not ask her whether she wanted to get a job in order to help the business or was she just merely disappointed with their business and wanted to leave it behind. After all these thousand of days their relationship became prosaic like most other couples does in the world. He had to run the business all by himself then. He was so afraid of losing her but he kept telling himself that everything is going to be fine.

Eventually, he failed to deceive himself for any longer. Gradually, the girl did not to come to the shop after work, saying that she was tired after long days of works. He dreamed to have the old times back but sometimes dream is just a dream. He realized the girl’s dream had changed. The girl joined a singing competition and he gave her full support because he knew it had been one of her dreams too. To the girl, winning the competition and gaining a contract to be a singer was her greatest dream of all. He knew if she won she would probably leave him forever but he did not hesitate to help her whenever she requested.

She won eventually. At the same time he had to shut down the shop although it seemed to be the last common thing left between them. The girl did not say goodbye to him but he knew nothing else was left between them. Or what he thought was that the girl might not even care to think about him. So he got himself a boring job as a clerk just to earn the living.

On the other hand, it was not easy to survive in the entertainment field either. People were greedy and insincere because they all wanted to be the outpaced one. She worked very hard every day to gain the audiences’ hearts. Her career went up and down. Sometimes, she was very depressed when facing unconstructive criticisms.

She was earning much money, meeting celebrities and lived a luxury lifestyle. She became one of them. It made her very different from him who only made a few thousands dollar per month. This was one of reasons she did not even say goodbye to him. She could find herself a boyfriend from her
celebrities friends but it was always better for a teenage idol to not have a boyfriend. Moreover, it seemed to her that boys from the entertainment field were all merely with fancy appearances. It was too difficult to get true love that she would rather have her fame skyrocketed.

It had been a year after their separation, he was still overwhelmed by the sadness. He went to her concert and watched her performance. He kept his eyes on her for the whole night while she was under the spotlights for thousands of people, certainly without noticing him at all. Sometimes he wondered what would happened if he did not support her to go to the singing competition back then. He read and heard about rumors of her handsome boyfriend or even getting married soon. Although they now had no contact at all, he had a strange thought that they were competing to marry first.

Getting married and having a family were dreams of her but she is at a point of no return now. She feels the impossibility to live a life a normal life. However, it is not her main concern anymore, she wants to be a world-famous class of singer. She wants success in her career. She moves on from one goal to another after succeeding, it is then she knows no satisfaction anymore. She is definitely lost in this fantasyland. ‘What is success?’ ‘Is this really what I dreamt of?’ There are no answer for her questions.

After failing his dream of running a business and marrying the girl, he now works just for living and has married another girl who loves him very much. ‘Can I really love my wife after all?’ He tries to convince himself to say ‘yes’ to the question every day. But ‘I have succeeded in marrying before she does anyway’, said the boy, who also has no idea about the word ‘success’ indeed.

Is a dream just a dream? Or dreams are dreamt to be ruined?
The Strawberry Cake

Charmaine Li

It was wintry and mysteriously silent morning. I woke up from my bed and toddled to the dining room with my sleepy eyes as usual. I grabbed a jacket on the back of the chair and put it on quickly. I turned to the mirror and buttoned up the jacket with my half opened eyes. A girl with messy hair, huge dark circles around her eyes, and a runny nose stood in front of me in the mirror. My lifeless and blurry image reminded me of burning the midnight oil the night before and there were still loads of assignments and presentations dating me.

Suddenly I saw a dark shadow passing through the dining room and rushed to the kitchen from the mirror. I immediately turned my head and looked into the kitchen. I could smell the irresistible nice smell of cup noodles. It was my brother who made the noodle. He turned his head to me; hold the cup of noodles on his hands. Brother looked fatter than usual though he was not wearing many clothes. He sweated on such a cold day and looked pale and exhausted. I found a little red scar on his right hand when he took the chopsticks from the shelf. He was probably burnt by the hot water when he made the noodles. ‘Oh... You are here? No class today?’ he said in a breathless voice.

No school today... Today is Sunday. You hurt your right hand, are you all right?’ I asked.

It was so strange to find brother in the house but I did not question myself about this. Instead I could not believe that the fat boy in front of me is my brother. He looked very/dramatically different from my vague memory the way I remembered him.

Brother smiled in response. ‘Are you not feeling well? Are you hungry?’ he asked while he was swallowing down the noodles quickly as if he did not eat for days. ‘Yes... I'm always allergic to the cold... but I will be fine... Are you still hungry? Do you need some more food?’ I asked. It seemed a normal conversation with my brother. However, I have noticed that his behavior was
strange. I had not seen him so hungry as if he did not eat for days. My heart kept stirring around as I could not bear to see him like this. I wanted to ask him why he looked so miserable but I did not want to disturb him from eating. The uncomfortable feeling spread to my whole body.

While I was waiting for him to finish the noodle, I concentrated on looking at my brother's face closer and closer. Suddenly, I remembered one thing. The thing I told myself was not real though I knew it was the truth. Maybe I could only fulfill the incomplete puzzles in dream to let myself feeling a little bit better. I wished the illusion could last longer for me to find the answer and say all the things that I hoped to say.

With courage, I finally spoke to my brother. 'I miss you. Are you living well in the other place?' But silence replied me. He did not say a word, just smile at me and said in a calm voice, 'I have finished the noodle.' He put down the chopsticks on the empty cup and walked away in a strange rolling gait. One step, two step, three step...... He walked further and further away. I should be able to catch him if I tried, but I did not know why I stood like a wood log. No! Don't leave so soon! You still have not yet answered me! When will you be back again? Mom missed you...' I cried in a low voice. I tried my best to remember the image of his back but the vision became blurred as mist. Even I did not want him to leave but he still vanished as I had predicted. When my vision became clear again, I could just see a grasshopper hopping on the top of the empty noodle cup. I knew in my heart that it was not the ending I wanted it to be but it was time to release, time to let him go.

'GRASSHOPPER...GRASS...HOPPER!' I heard my seven year old niece's piercing voice and was awakened. I found myself lying calmly on the bed in my bedroom. My head was surrounded by a soaked pillow and part of my hair was wet. Probably, I was crying without my notice when I had the departure with my brother in the dream. I found it strange that I unconsciously managed to remember the whole dream clearly and incorporated the screaming of grasshopper from my niece into my own dream. It has been six months since the sudden death of my brother because of the heart attack. However, sometimes I still unconsciously think that he is just working in another place, forgetting the truth that I will never see him again in my life.
My eyes felt heavy and itchy and I could feel tears left on my face. My whole face felt salty and drenched. Suddenly, I heard the running footsteps of my niece dashing towards my room. I quickly jumped out of bed and locked door, for fear that she knew I cried and told my Mom. I seized the hairdryer among the mountains of books from my desk, plunged in the power supply with my clumsy fingers and switched on the hairdryer. Some of my books, folders and notes fell down on the floor but I did not bother to pick them up. Immediately, I switched on the hairdryer and dried my pillow. Within seconds, my niece knocked / banged on my door and shook the door handle hysterically, Wake up, Charmaine! Open the door, Charmaine! Grandmother asked me to tell you lunch is ready. Say thank you to me for delivering the message to me Auntie Charmaine!

'Alright.....Thank you! I will be..... right here!' I replied with a shaky voice. I rapidly turned the power of my hairdryer to the maximum and put it on the bed. Then, I rushed to my desk to tidy up the books. I was at war with my bedroom. At the same time, I felt like a thief who had done something wrong, trying to destroy all the evidence of my crying.

After several minutes, I went to the dining room to have lunch. It was such warm day with beautiful sunshine. I sat on the chair next to the window and watched outside. The leaves on the tree were turning yellow and brown. All the leaves were flickering with the wind. Some of the brown leaves could no longer resist the strong wind. Following the call of the wind, they became disconnected with the tree. For a short while, they swayed in the air, forming an autumn symphony with the wind. Gradually, the leaves rested on the ground peacefully.

Mom put a bowl of hot mushroom soup in front of me. It was my favourite soup. I stirred the soup for a while with my spoon and put it into my mouth. Nice view with nice soup, but I could not really enjoy them with my heart. I was absent minded. My mind was only full of the blurred image of my brother and I kept thinking about the misery of him in my dream. Though I knew it was not true but I could not let go of the worry I had for him. My head was spinning.

How's the soup?' Mom asked. 'Too salty!' my niece replied, putting her tongue out. Mom turned to look at me. 'It is good!' I said. Mom smiled with
content. I knew Mom made this soup for me. However, to be honest, I was just swallowing the hot liquid mechanically. I could not taste it at all. It was tasteless.

After lunch, Mom and my niece planned to buy me a cake for an early celebration of my birthday. We went to the nearest bakery shop. On our way, I was deep in my thought and walked slower and slower. Mom and my niece walked in the front of me. My niece had a chubby body like a ball with a round head. She was just like a mini snowman. I could see Mom's grey and silver hair shimmering in the sunlight. Her body looked thin and her legs were as slim as bamboo sticks. Watching Mom's back and her dark slender shadow, I could imagine her pressure and burden was no less than mine. Gazing at the sketch of the long shadow holding hands with a bouncing round shadow on the ground, it reminded me of the delightful moments of holding hands to go shopping with Mom in my childhood.

A strong scent of chocolate awoke me from my thought. I walked faster to catch up with Mom and niece. They were already inside the bakery shop. The shop had a transparent kitchen, you could see the chef at work behind the glass walls. A chef with a fat tummy greeted us with a warm smile. He was holding a steaming chocolate cake fresh out of the oven.

'Welcome! What kind of cake are you looking for? We promise to make any cake for the customers right after we receive the order. We guarantee to bake a fresh cake for any occasion with your desired favour.' The chef spoke in a lively voice.

'Tell the chef what kind of birthday cake you would like to have!' My Mom said to me in a gentle voice.

While thinking about the answer, an intimate scene of me making strawberry jelly with my brother twinkled in my mind. I was in my blue angelic-sleeved kindergarten uniform when we were stirring the jelly mixture together, some liquid splashed on my uniform. The sweet aroma of strawberry surrounded the whole kitchen...... Um... I would like a strawberry cake. Thank you,' I answered.

The chef smiled in reply. He set out to work right away. He lined up different kinds of power, jam and butter on the kitchen counter, and carefully
measured the amount he needed in the way a caring father would measure milk powder for his baby boy. He added them into a huge bowl bit by bit. Then, he started to stir the mixture with great energy. The crummy mixture gradually turned smooth and creamy.

The chef carefully put the creamy mixture into the oven. He turned it on and adjusted the temperature and set the time to twenty minutes. Then, the cake started to spin around on the glass plate in a circle. Pores appeared on the cake and broke its smooth white surface. Heat trapped the cake and it gradually turned from creamy to yellowish-brown. A few more circles later, the cake became even darker, it shimmered with delicious golden brown, and it was ready.

Watching the cake trapped in the oven its rotation aroused a strange sensation in me. The cake entrapped under heat made me think of the pressure we face while growing up. Parents carefully prepared the best for us in our childhood. Growing from childhood to teenage and then adulthood, we would encounter obstacles, challenges and pressure in academic work or suffer the pain of our throbbing memories. Sometimes, these agonizing recollections kept spinning in our mind just like the heat of the oven the cake endured. We wished to release them but it was not yet the mature time. We patiently wait and uncomplainingly let those times pass. When we learn to let the suppressed experience turn into motivation or energy, we would finally become a mature adult.

Beep!” A piercing alarm sounded from the oven. The light inside the oven went off. The chef went to the oven and opened it. White hot steam out gushed from the oven. The shop became foggy. The balmy warm moisture sweetened the air of the bakery. The milky vapors gradually evaporated. A golden brown cake appeared in front of me. It looks firm, plain and mature, with steam coming out from it.

The chef carefully put the cake on the table. He squeezed white cream around the edge, then sliced some red strawberries and placed them on top. He decorated the cake with beautiful red flowers. Then, he sprinkled some rainbow chocolate chips on top. As a finishing touch, he tied a ribbon around the cake. The cake looked gorgeous, It looked like a colourful flower
garden. The chef lifted the cake up and handed to me with a big grin on his face.

Looking at the gorgeous strawberry cake on his hand, I suddenly understood an important lesson. I received the cake and carry it home with Mom and niece. On our way back home, my steps were as light as feather. I appreciated the golden sunset that made the pavement shine. Life is beautiful though it is full of ups and downs. However, I should not let the past hold me down. I should not let those worries and doubts blind me of the beauty on my journey.

When we arrived home, Dad opened the door for us. He looked tired with dark circles around his eyes, but he smiled so happily that the wrinkles on his face blossomed into a chrysanthemum. Dad wore his favourite shirt. He scattered the little glittering paper on us when I stepped in the house. ‘Happy Birthday! Happy Twentieth!’ Mom, Dad and niece cheered. With the sparkling paper on my shoulder, I felt that I was showered with love and blessed by everyone. My heart pumped faster than usual. My throat was dry and hot. The hotness grew from my neck to my face. I could feel my eyes swollen as if it was going to flood.

Sitting on the chair, I watched Mom carefully laid the strawberry cake on the table, putting decorations on the side. Niece helped to put candles on top of the cake, counting from one to twenty. Dad lit the candles. Looking at the glowing cake that flickered with warm candlelight, the house suddenly became like a dreamy place. I blew the candles with niece contentedly and Mom cut the cake for us. Dad set the camera into the ten seconds auto-mode and rushed to us. We all smiled happily to the camera. ‘Click!’ These ten seconds would stay my heart forever.

Submerged in the laughter of my family, I put a slice of the strawberry cake into my mouth. It slowly melted on my tongue. So sweet.

So sweet.
Fantastic White Night

The city fell asleep
fantastic white night.
Soon it will wake up.
The end of your fairy tale.

You lose in the misery.
A flower that can walk.
Blossom at the end
of this fantastic night.

He Jing
It is a ‘centipede’, but a disabled one. It is a ‘joke’, but a satiric one. What do you think it is?

—It is a scar, a belly scar. Oh, you do not take me wrong, I was too young to give birth to a baby, nor was I a Japanese warrior who committed hara-kiri (剖腹自杀) when licked by the enemy. It is the evidence of a small operation in which I had my corrupt appendix cut five years ago. Generally speaking, this ‘centipede’ would be a nuisance if it wormed on other girls belly, especially when it puffed like an over-nourished baby year by year. I can’t say I never mind. But to me, it is more like a socket, every time my finger slides through it, the electric plug is put in, and the scene emerges before my eyes: that clear April afternoon, that small shabby operating room, that old operator… all come back. If possible, I will laugh, but only a bitter one.

It was 3p.m. in an informal and small operating room, a fourteen year old girl lay on a cold rectangle iron bedstead with her feet out of the edge. Beneath her body was a hard deep brown cushion with several belts set on both side of it. She felt like lying on a gigantic octopus, which stretched its numerous claws to get hold of her. She tried to move her body, to escape, but the legs and feet stayed like statues. Right, she had just had anaesthesia during which the drug was injected into her body through the interspace of the spinal, three times, the doctor failed three times to find the proper interplace. Oh, you couldn’t blame him for the girl’s crooked spinal. But you can count on it that no anaesthesia isn’t hurting. Let’s get back to the girl. Over her belly stood a four-foot iron shelf on which a white iron tray is placed. The iron tray had the same size as the surface of the shelf. In it arrayed various surgical knives, glass bottles with coloured liquids which she had no clue of their functions, a cluster of cotton balls, several needles and strings. Weird smell slipped from these bottles, mixed with the wide-spread odor killed her nasal cavity and throat. The air-conditioning had been turned on before she entered the room, but she still quivered severely. She diverted her head toward the door, wanted to call her
mother in, to take her away from this awful place. Oh, poor girl, it was late, you were destined to be the fish, waiting for the butcher to cut you into pieces. Knowing the operator would come in any minute, she turned her head, held back the dripping tears, prayed for a good luck. Yes, this helpless girl was me, who was just fourteen year old, who had no knowledge of this cutting thing, who simply wanted to go home. When I was talking to Guan Yin Pu Sa(a god in Buddhism), the door was opened, but then it was shut. I magnified my eyes, trying to remember those ‘butchers’ faces. In case I encountered any accident, I could see my parents in their dreams and tell them how they ‘killed’ me. First came into sight was an old man in a loose white robe, quiet short, thin, cheekbone heaved utterly from his freckled and a shrivelled face, papery lips opened and closed once a while, I bet he was a master of gossip, at least a talkative one. Followed were two ‘characteristicless’ people, one was a thirtyish woman, flat sallow face, several shallow threads of wrinkles clung to her eye corner, a small mole lied on the left side of her nose, close to her nostril, as if she had left a bit of black sesame paste(黑芝麻糊) on her nose while having breakfast. She owned an air of solemn. I could tell youth and enthusiasm had flown away from her. Compared with the gloomy woman, the young man, seemed to be over-energetic. He buzzed around the old man, checked the stuff in the tray again and again, as if he couldn’t wait to open my smooth belly. Yeah, you couldn’t blame him, a green surgeon, who was dying to practice the theories he learned from books. What a perfect team. Now, I am going to count my life on these people. Guan Yin Pu Sa bless me!

Ok, here we go. Let’s get rid of the little wicked appendix quickly, and go back home. It’s the third operation I have today, I’m really tired,’ the old man complained when putting on his plastic gloves.

‘Hi, doctor, you are about to take an organ from a human body, not to kill some annoying pests. You shouldn’t rush, be serious!’ I exclaimed inside.

‘Wow, this ‘bad guy’ is fishy, hides too deep. I should have a bigger cut. Pass me the knife,’ the surgeon said to the nurse.

‘What, you’ve already cut my belly? It’s impossible! I feel nothing! I hear nothing! God, you really cut it, fine, I forgive you for not asking whether I am ready to let you cut my flesh, but you don’t even bother to give me a hint, at least show me the knife you gonna use to perform it, you cruel old man.’ I
glared at him, but the heat radiated from my eyes seemed harmless to him, in fact he wasn’t aware of it, let alone feeling it. To save my energy, I withdrew it. I couldn’t believe my belly was opened.

Doctor Li, try the right side beneath the fat, it probably lies there,’ the young man boldly suggested, wished he could plunge his restless hand right into my belly and grasp the appendix.

Then I saw the operator changed his position again and again, narrowed his hollowed eyes, as if his sight could pierce my skin, my flesh and blood, direct locate on my appendix. At the meantime his right arm didn’t move often, I knew his uneven hand was rummaging in my belly, poking at my intestines and fats, trying to grasp the corrupt appendix. My heart soared into my throat. What if he still can’t find the appendix, am I going to die?’ I dare not think further. I wished I had had a general anaesthesia to avoid witnessing this bloody nightmare.

‘Gee, you need to lose weight, too much fat in the belly,’ the formidable nurse said to me: a still growing adolescent.

‘You do not mess with me, nurse. I am not in a good mood,’ I shouted inside. My blood rushed into the top of my head, face flushed, I quivered like the timbal of beating trap drum. I inhaled a deep breath, ready to spur my rage.

Excuse me, nurse. I...’ before I finished my words, a shouting pierced my ear, ‘You got it, Doctor Li, you got it.’ The houseman was sounded more excited than me, the true patient. At last my hanging heart landed to its former place. In the next minutes, they began to sew the cut, this time, my operator wasn’t that preoccupied, yeah, he was close to the end of the operation and his cozy home. What I couldn’t understand is he constantly tossed his head, measuring the common looking nurse, smiled and nodded, as if she had some secret connection with his untold plot. Come on, doctor, you were old enough to be her father, what on earth was in your mind? As I was thinking, the historical conversation was generated. The old doctor finally said, Xiao Zhang, I heard you had a date the other day. How was it going?’

‘Oh, I’d rather not talk about this. I screwed it again.’

‘Oh, sorry to hear that.’

‘It’s ok. Anyway, it may be the eighth time, I am used to it.’
Xiao Zhang, since we are talking, I happened to have an intimated colleague, whose son is a decent guy. Maybe I can arrange a date for you. What do you say?

"Oh, don't bother, Doctor Li. I know my limitation."

"Why? Xiao Zhang, well, I don't mean to offend you, but you are twenty-nine this year, you got to be hurry."

"You must be kidding. She is only twenty-nine, how come? I bet she is more than thirty five. Look at her crow's-feet and loose skin, listen to her mean words. No wonder she can't find someone," I thought.

Besides, this boy isn't that perfect, he is a little bookish, but he is good otherwise. Let's say you two meet next Thursday, is it ok for you?" my officious operator resumed.

"Well, as you said these, I guess I can give it a shoot. Now, tell me more, Doctor Li. Is he handsome? Is he tall? Is he..."

"Dear God, are these people talking about a date, hello, we are not done here, the cut is still open. And the patient can hear you. among all these ridicule deeds they'd done to me, this one took the cake. But I forgot that it never rains but it pours.

"Ok, we're almost done here. Now, pass me a No. 3 needle then I can finish this and go home.'

The nurse barely looked at the tray, just picked up a needle at her hand randomly, then she passed it to the operator. I knew her mind had flown into the clouds, busied in fancying the handsome guy, who might become her boyfriend, even husband, though the possibility was thin.

"So, Doctor Li, we have a deal, right?"

"Oops, no. 'the old man frowned.

"What's wrong?" The nurse feared he had a second thought.

"Xiao Li, have you just passed me a No. 3 needle, it's struck and crooked, it shouldn't be such vulnerable."

"Hum? No. 3? Oh, it might be No. 3, or No. 5, I, I, let me check.'

Hearing this terrible news, the frivolous woman bent down her head in half a second, checked those needles, hoping that she had picked up the right needle.
And what was I doing? I felt dizzy. Someone knocked on my head heavily with a robber hammer, 'bang', then I passed out.

It's ok, I make it, really a close call.' The old doctor swept away the sweats on his forehead.

Thank God. You're amazing, Doctor Li.'

An hour later, in the ward, Mum patted on my shoulder, 'Sweet, wake up, are you fine?'

'Mum? Am I still alive? Oh I must have died, the doctor, that old wizard, he killed me, Mum, and, that careless nurse, the one with a mole on her nose, she...' 

Hush, honey, you are alive. Nobody can claim my adorable daughter. Now you need rest. And Mama will be here.' She stroked me softly, at the corner of her eyes, I saw the trace of tears, happy tears.

The effect of the anaesthetic began to ebb, the shooting pain began to bite me. But like a devastated man who had survived in a risky adventure, I managed to fall asleep, though not a sound one.

Two weeks later, I had the stitches taken out, I stared at it for a century long. Mum was right, it definitely looked like a centipede, yet a disabled one, for the last needle was crooked. Yes, so was it two weeks ago, and so it would be forever.

Dear reader, you must be laughing now, why not? After all, not all patients are lucky enough to experience a date arrangement during their operations.

It's a 'centipede', but a disabled one.

It's a joke', but a satiric one.
You stupid girl

I stood up, slightly hunched with my hands gripping the side of my pinafore. The gripping was renewed every few seconds as my palm rubbed the sweat into the absorbing cloth. The clothes on my body were my only security and I felt lucky that I had them on, not naked. Although my private body was covered, my face was uncovered from the humiliation. This, I felt extremely naked. Face was the ultimate treasure of my family and I was taught to protect it from any circumstances. Obviously I failed the motto. The intensity and humiliation were so strong that I could feel them pushing against me from all directions. I was almost too weak to resist the force and to defend myself but I was also too dumb to react. Although my head was low, I could see them from the corner of my eyes. They did not dare to talk for they were preys like me, not wanting to be in the same position as I was. Peeking at HuiQing, a girl with beautiful features but nasty self, let my dissatisfaction bottled up as her eyes smirked at me with hidden excitement, silently from behind. The rest of the eyes were glued to me as the drama went on. Some eyes were plainly staring, some with fear, some with sympathy but most with helplessness. No prey would be stupid enough to jump out and be eaten. I was like a deer being ripped and dominated by the aggressive tiger. This deer was tolerating the pain with its eyes wet.

‘Why are you so stupid?’

She continued like a machine, never tired of opening and closing her mouth. Her teeth were yellowish with one being slightly slanted. Her face had open pores as well as rough and flabby skin. She seemed to have hair like Elvis Presley for hers was not as neatly combed. Looking at her fringe always reminded me of my favourite curry puff. What attracted my attention most was the distinctive red bean size mole under her left eye. It was that particular mole that distracted me from everything else. ‘It shouldn’t be there.’ I always thought to myself. The bit of saliva coming out of her mouth rested on my right cheek. My hands dared not wipe the saliva away. I stared at her like a
snow man, definitely without a smile, but with accumulating wetness in my eyes.

‘You go back Malaysia lad.’

Silence for a moment. She stared hard at me with anger of frustration, so hard that I could feel the pressure on my eyeballs. Yes the pressure succeeded in pushing the teardrops down, swiftly. She knew she had to stop, but she did not.

‘Cry cry cry! You think you baby ah?’

Her forefinger pointed at me and the additional weapon made me shiver. It was the first time I shivered so much. My pounding heartbeats drummed my body as the army of loudness and finger-pointing attacked my territory of weakness. She was invading me. Crying was my only way of defense for she could not speak proper Mandarin. She knew that I could not understand English as I came in later in mid April 1995, from Malaysia. Of all the words that she had spoken for such a long time, I could only understand ‘stupid’, ‘girl’, ‘cry’, ‘baby’ and ‘Malaysia’. These few words were not what a seven year-old child would want to hear for they conveyed nastiness. Trapped in a world of communication breakdown, I learned to play safe by playing dumb. What can I say? I had a lot to say, but how? I felt helpless.

She must become exhausted from the shouting as she gave a heavy sigh of tiredness. Before she finally gave up scolding, she threw the paper on my table. A big red ‘28’ strikes out from the right-hand corner of the paper. I took the paper. 28’I thought to myself. I knew it was a number far from fifty but I did not quite know why the number on the paper mattered. I sat down and tried to stop the tears and trembling.

She went through the questions with us as we needed to do corrections. Throughout the lesson, she did not look at me at all. Nobody talked to me. Everyone pretended I never existed. I looked at them but their eyes avoided mine. As I said, face is important because it hides weaknesses and prevents discrimination and ignorance. I had no choice but to copy everything from the person sitting next to me and I had to do it secretly by peeking.

Ring!

I was so relieved that her class finally ended. It was recess and I walked to the canteen. When I thought that peace had returned, I felt a strong pull on
my ponytail. I turned and saw HuiQing and her gang laughing out heartedly. I remembered my mum's golden phrase 'When people provoke you, ignore them. If you react, you are the stupid one.' Recalling the incident of 'stupidity,' I did not want to be stupider for I was stupid enough to be named 'stupid' for the umpteen times. So I decided to ignore and walked briskly away from them. They did not chase after me but instead shouted 'stupid girl' excitedly like a group of cheerleaders. Tolerance, I reminded myself again.

Perhaps crying took up much of my energy that my stomach started making noises. I bought a bowl of fishball noodles. Fishball was my favourite but eating alone definitely loses its taste and flavouring. It was the duty of every student to clear the table by placing the plate and utensils in a big pail. After eating, I did what was regulated and placed my plate into the pail. As I was doing so, the fork and spoon fell into the pail and created a loud bang. Two boys from my class happened to be standing a distance not far from me, reacted exaggeratedly by saying loudly,

'Uh oh! You're in trouble!!'

The school principal happened to walked past, saw the boys' reactions and looked at me. Upon seeing the presence of the school principal, the boys pretended nothing had happened and walked away in a quick pace. I stood there not knowing what to do under such a sudden incident. The school principal then gestured for me to go to her and I did what was instructed. The weigh on my chest caused nervous breathing for I feared the authority figure. Moreover, it was normally not a good sign to see the principal. I knew strangeness was approaching.

I stood in front of her, my head shrinking to my neck and my eyes intimidated. Her look was stern, hands were on her hips and lips were tightened. She muttered a few lines and I swear to God that I did not understand a single word. I did not even know when the full-stop ended. Therefore, I dazed at her.

Without my knowing, she slapped my right cheek slightly but firmly. I was shocked and confused. My eyes were wide open with bewilderment and fear. Why are you slapping me?' I wanted to pop the question but I could not utter a single word. 'Help!' I screamed to myself.
She slapped again, a few more times this round. I could not remember what exactly happened around me. I could only recall students passing by and taking a glance of me, mumbling among themselves. Their eyes scanned through every part of me and their ears were signaling for the content. We were almost at the center of the canteen so most students knew about this incident. I could felt my body and face burning. It was burning like charcoal, red and hot. ‘Why is everybody treating me this way?’ ‘What have I done wrong?’ were all the doubts bottling up. I cried again softly.

Ring!

The bell rang and the school principal stopped slapping. Before releasing me, she pointed at me with her fore-finger and muttered something into my eyes. I did not understand, but I could guess it was some sort of warning. I ran back to class.

Ring!

The final bell rang. I could finally escape, for the evening.

Although they had to carry school bags seemingly larger than them, they were running so happily and freely like nothing was on their back. They were so eager to be the first few to get into the bus for they knew they were going home. Home sweet home. My bag was heavy, so was my heart.

Places by places, One by one, the kids hopped down the bus excitedly when they saw their love ones waiting for them to come home. The mother smiled when her long awaited child finally came back from school. The child smiled for he missed the comfort warmth and security embraced by his mother. The mother carried the bag for him as she did not want the bag to cause her child to suffer from any single pain. The child ran about happier, narrating about that day’s interesting lesson to his mother. The mother definitely loved his story as she was smiling wider. They were holding hands too.

The bus was emptying as there were only three kids left. With almost everyone gone, the bus felt so empty and quiet. Silence scares me. I was the next to alight.

She was not there. My grandmother lied to me again. She promised to fetch me. She never come. My heart weighs a ton and my bag added the weight to it. I walked alone, along the path to the flat. It was seven in the evening and almost dark. It was windy with the dried leaves rustling around my feet. I got
to the flat and stood in front of the lift. Remember, never ever take a lift with a stranger. They will sell you away. My grandmother always warned. I guessed she said this because she never planned to fetch me anyway. All strangers looked like pirates to me, especially this one standing next to me as he was smoking and speaking Hokkiens over the phone. I decided to take the stairs.

The stairs was dark, dirty and smelly. You could not see the corner nor any approaching figures coming if there were any. I hesitated for a moment. I looked back at the scary man and at the stairs again. It's only five storeys. Run faster and you'll be there in no time. I plucked up the courage and dashed up the stairs. The bag was pulling me backward but I forced myself forward. My feet were cold as I recalled scary images of ghosts and vampires that appeared in the movies. What if they come through the wall? It was horrifying.

I reached the apartment, it was small and narrow that you could see the kitchen and the living room at the entrance in a single glance. As usual, she was in the kitchen, busy serving the players at the majong table. Popo! I was calling her as a sign that I had returned home. Go and have dinner. She replied briefly and continued pouring tea. I sat on the sofa to catch my breath. For the time I had been sitting, no one took notice of me. My eyes followed the movement of my grandma and realized that the lines around her eyes and on her forehead were deeper. These were caused by years of frowning and suppression; Suppressed resentment towards the demanding customers at the table. When the players said: I need tissue; my grandma would take it for them without hesitation. She had had enough to please, let alone coaxing me for dinner.

Popo, I want to eat fried egg. My grandma would pretend that she had heard nothing. When I repeated the question, she became annoyed and said Fried it by yourself. I would rather choose not to after recalling the 'egg' incident not long ago.

Why are you so stupid ah? I had enough to work for and you're giving me more work. Go out and don't mess with my kitchen! My grandma exclaimed.

My elbow accidentally knocked the wok of frying egg which, like a domino, knocked down a small pot of soup next to it. I messed up the kitchen
as well as the dinner for that night. I walked out of the kitchen, crying bitterly and feeling guilty.

I did not want to repeat the history of ‘egg’ incident. I did not want to ruin the dinner, the kitchen and be nagged ‘stupid’ again. How I wished my mum was here, frying egg for me. All fried eggs may look, smell and taste the same to others, but my mum’s fried egg had an extra element of love.

‘When you fry an egg, you have to be gentle or else it won’t look good.’ My mother was telling me while I stood aside, observing the egg. That particular night, I had steamed rice, steamed chicken drumstick and a fried egg for dinner. There was no one else in the house as my grandma and her players were at a casino in Genting Highland, gambling. It was the first time that my mum and I had the whole apartment all to ourselves. My mum made good use of this kind of opportunity to cook for me. The meal was simple, but extremely delicious. The house was peaceful and warmth. After dinner, we watched the tv programmes together and then went to bed. My mum would stroke my head and my back gently while I was trying to sleep. Then, she would kiss my forehead when she thought that I had fallen asleep. I love this moment as I felt so safe and secured. How I wish my mum would never leave me, but cook and sleep by my side every night.

Go and have dinner before it gets cold.’ My grandma nagged. Looking at my grandma, I knew I could never get the warmth and comfort from her. I missed my mother. I picked up the phone and dialed.

‘Hello? Mummy?’

‘Bao Bei!’

‘Mummy, when are you coming to visit me? I miss you...’

‘Mummy is busy working. Mummy needs to earn enough money to buy you chocolates, you know? Be a good girl. Don’t make Popo angry, ok? Mummy misses you too.’

‘Ok mummy... Mummy, I got a twenty-eight for English...’

‘Really? Hmm. It is your first test. Work harder for the next one ok?’

‘Yes mummy, I will. And I miss your cooking too... visit me soon, ok?’

‘Yes Bao Bei.’
My heart became so much lighter as soon as the conversation was over. Everything else did not matter anymore; the teacher, the headmaster, the kids at school, my grandma and the players were only the tiny characters in my life. Their remark about my stupidity mattered less. My mum matters most. If my mummy did not say that I am stupid, I am not stupid.

Still smiling, without feeling any sense of stupidity, I stood up and walked to the dining table. I sat and ate a mouthful of rice, thinking to myself 'Mummy cooks the best rice in the world.'
Right Here Waiting

Teo Li Chuan

I was sitting in front of my study desk in the hostel, dazed. The movie which was being played on my laptop seemed to become motionless and I could not focus on the lines coming out of the actor’s mouth. My mind was swirling and my throat was blocked that I could not breathe smoothly. At the moment, everything around me became worthless and I could not bring myself to believe it. Nothing in the world could drag my attention away from this very moment. I was still holding my mobile phone, gripping firmly so it would not slip from my sweaty palm. I tried hard to withdraw myself from sounding depressed and so I swallowed the accumulated lump of saliva down my throat, asking.

‘When did it happen?’

‘Three days ago, my dear,’ my mother replied.

My vision became so blur that I could see only lights and figures. Still acting calmed, I asked again.

‘Why wasn’t I informed?’

There was a short silence and I could feel her hesitation through the long distance call.

‘I was busy with his funeral and I did not want you to go through this pain in Hong Kong alone, I’m sorry.’

Tears rolled down my cheeks and my vision became clear again. The tears did not contain only grievance but anger as well. The inner part of me was fuming with heat of dissatisfaction on why I was not informed immediately. I was having fun foolishly when they were at his funeral in another part of the Earth. I felt sinful. Contradictory, part of me just could not blame my mother for her nature of protecting her daughter.

I was lost for words. Then my mother continued.

‘He is now in heaven with God and memories were left of him. Live on.’
What my mum said was true, live on. After assuring her that I was ‘fine’, we ended the call by sending invisible kiss. I knew she needed the kiss even though I could not feel her grievance. She was a tough lady, so tough that I might mistaken her as cold-blooded. Had I inherited her genes of acting tough? I did not know.

I sat on the chair abnormally doing nothing. I could not hold back the sob that choked me as images of him flashed through my mind.

I remember my grandfather as a skinny short old man who, like most elderly, seemed to grow shorter as days past. The outer skin clinging his hands was wrinkled and crumpled to the extent that it carried too much weight. Heavy as it seemed, his hands would shake whenever he held a cup. No one would ever expect that an aged man who could not even hold a cup well could still play a piano. However shaky his hands were, he never failed to play the piano every evening after dinner. He would sit in front of the piano with his back hunched no matter how hard he tried to keep it upright. Then, he would sit peacefully for a moment before started playing, as if trying to recall. As soon as he started, you could feel the energies that were rekindled in him and his hands would move swiftly from key to key, as though they were the hands of his youth. His eyes would close from time to time, enjoying every rhythm of the note. As his hands moved, his body would move along slowly from side to side. The look on his face was tired, yet filled with tranquility and triumph. Playing the piano always bring him back to the golden moment of his life.

But, whenever he happened to play a love song named ‘Right here waiting,’ his expression changed. You could see no look of happiness but sorrows. As I grew older, my curiosity grew as well. One day while I was helping my mother out in the kitchen, I suddenly popped the question to her.

‘Why was grandpa so unhappy when he played the song ‘Right Here Waiting’?’

‘Your grandfather played the piano and sang this song during his marriage proposal to your grandmother. He had no money, no status and nothing. Yet, he managed to win the heart of your grandmother with just a song. Romantic, isn’t it?’

I was surprised that my grandfather could be such a romantic man. Then another curiosity aroused.
'Then why did grandma left him since they had such a sweet romance?'

'Beats me. Ask him then.'

I kept silent and continued helping my mother. I knew I wanted an answer and I was going to ask my grandfather but I was so occupied with my national examination that I had no time to talk to him. I always drag to tomorrow and never-endings tomorrow. After a year, I forgot all about it.

Now that my grandfather is gone, I felt ashamed of myself. It is an irony of life that we take the closest person around us for granted. The doubts were still in my mind. All I knew was that my grandfather loved my grandmother to the core of the Earth and he would never thought of seeking another true love once again, even though she left him decades ago. He was always there, playing the piano, waiting for my grandmother to return to his side. I despised myself for not paying more attention to my grandfather.

The more I thought of it, the more I felt remorseful. I sat and cried bitterly alone. I knew I should do something to make it up to my grandfather but he is already dead, was it even possible? Images of the piano and then my grandmother flashed through my mind again. The answers were still waiting for me.

Yes, I knew what I should do.
Four in the afternoon at Jenkin's Dancing Studio, Jasmine is standing in front of a few big mirrors, with one hand on a mirror and the other on a ballet bar. She is expecting someone. Suddenly, a young man comes in. She notices that quickly. The young man looks modest with his tanned skin. His dark brown eyes are wide and tear-filled as if they have something to say to you; his lips are sealed as if they are full of secrets; but the cropped strawberry blond hair of his gives people an impression of naughtiness. He is skinny — too skinny that he seems like he hasn't been eating for a month. Jasmine turns and faces him. She looks at him interestingly and asks, 'Did Mr Dovers send you here? How old are you?' The young man is surprised by the latter question, 'Yes, ma'am. I am twenty three.' He can't be my age! Jasmine says to herself and is astonished by the answer.

And he, the young man, tries to scrutinize the lady with long black hair in front of him. He reads her face carefully. What he finds is not only the confusion but also a beautiful lady who is trying hard to pretend she doesn't care about the world. However, Jasmine doesn't seem to notice that her pair of gray eyes just betrayed her. Under her navy blue blouse and black-white striped jeans, is a petite body with a fragile soul that makes the young man have an impulse to hold her tight. But he is immediately bewildered by this ridiculous thought. He shakes his head a bit and the movement makes Jasmine become even more confused. Her confusion is clearly shown by her frowning. The young man fears his fidget will easily be observed, he therefore suggests to start the portrait drawing. Jasmine agrees with a smile.

The young man looks around the dancing room cautiously from left to right, top to bottom and general to specific, figuring out the best arrangement for the portrait. He moves a chair to the center, facing the mirrored walls. Jasmine watches him without knowing what to do as he is already sitting on the chair and taking out all his graphite drawing pencils and papers from a plain beige book bag. The man looks up and realizes the predicament she is in, 'Oh, I'm sorry. Stand there, please.' He points to a mirror which is right next to an
archway window with dark green silk curtains. Jasmine walks to the spot where he just pointed. She looks at herself in the mirror, taking off all her clothes. Although she turned her back on him, he can see everything from the reflection. He has been drawing nude portraits since he was fifteen years old; it has always been an easy job for him but this time – he feels like he is getting a heart attack; he feels like his blood pressure is rising rapidly; he feels like he can't breathe.

So, should I stand like this? Jasmine is now facing the young man with nothing on. She puts her hands behind her and leans on the ballet bar, standing casually with her feet crossed. The young man nods with pounding heartbeat which he is trying to control but his sensibility won't allow him to. He starts by drawing the entire shape of her, from top to bottom. When the sketching is done, he then starts putting some shadows and adding details with lighter strokes. He stops and glances at Jasmine to decide whether the proportions are accurate. The proportions are perfectly accurate so he begins to add even more details to the face and body with harder strokes.

Jasmine, who has been standing still for more than an hour, is studying his face. She wonders what his eyes have to say and what secrets his lips are holding; she wishes she could read his mind. A breeze of fall is blowing in her face. The presence of the young man gives her the kind of peacefulness that she has never experienced before and she wants to inhale it all with the cooling breeze; the pale face in front of the young man is getting rosy. Looking at this pulchritude, his desire is to walk to her to touch the face slightly from jaw to chin, put his fingers on her lips and kiss her with his dry lips. But he is a sensible man that knows what to do and what not to do. He gets back to the portrait promptly for the final step, rubbing the delicate areas with a light touch. Then he tells Jasmine that he is done and she can put her clothes on.

With excitement, Jasmine can't wait to see her portrait. She puts on her clothes in no time and runs to the young man. Yet, he won't let her see the drawing. He tells her not to see it until he leaves. Jasmine has no objection and pays him five pounds but the young man insists on not taking it. She watches him as he packs and leaves.

Now she is all alone in the room. She opens the sketchbook and can't believe her very own eyes – she has never seen herself in such way; the lady in
the picture is just as beautiful as Aphrodite in Greece. Then she finds a written line at the bottom, ‘Do you believe in love at first sight’? She is overwhelmed by the feeling of dizziness but has no time to think. She runs to the street, finds no trace of him. He is gone.

She gets home and calls Mr Dovers, asking how to contact the young man. Mr Dovers at first has no idea who she is talking about but then she brings up ‘the lad who draws nude portrait’. At that time, she realizes she knows nothing except the age of the young man; unfortunately, Mr Dovers knows nothing more than his first name. After a short silence, all Jasmine can do is to thank Mr Dovers and hang up.

Sitting next to a window, Jasmine gazes out, wondering what is beyond there. She then closes her eyes and holds the portrait to her chest, whispering to herself, ‘I do...’
It has been extremely difficult to evoke the **déjà vu** experience in laboratory settings, therefore making it a subject of few empirical studies. Certain researchers claim to have found ways to recreate this sensation using hypnosis.
As usually, lying on the cozy bed, I skimmed the Reader Digest, fiddling my fingers on margin of the page, and just wish there were something could capture my eyeballs. Yeah, all was just in my prediction, here came the sparking file: The story with your PETS. Always, I found it was really nostalgic—a word probably I am too young to use—to talk about pets. Since I begrudgingly transformed as a secondary school student, the distance between my dog, Handsome, and I had uncontrollably been farther and farther.

He came to my family when I was almost a brat, for not I longed for a new buddy to play with, but my mum’s request: as her factory needed a security guard, but mum insisted that a wolf dog was pretty circumspect to the surroundings and speaking of fidelity, the dog was the winner. These were all the reasons that he happened to my life. But before he was mature enough to work as a guard, he stayed with my family and I took care of him most of the time.

I gave him a name, Handsome, just as he was really handsome in my mind: a fit and slick black body contrasted with a cluster of fluffy snowy tie-shaped furs on the neck. His eye are luminously brown, cute but powerful. Handsome had his own personality: he always stayed in a tender-temper, friendly to me, but it was out of the case only when he gluttoned up his bloody savor raw meat. I tried to prank on him in games as I felt he must be easily hoodwinked by my smartness, so fun, but never tested his passion for the food. I knew his principle and bottom line, so he did understand mine. I hate he dumped in any unauthorized area, namely, outside the toilet. Obviously, at first he ruffled me; you could see how tightly my fist clenched then. After I chided him several times for that inappropriate behavior, he started to learn to go to the toilet himself. Truly, he was an intelligent boy, always learning things fast.

Years passed, it was a few years ago when last time I met him in the factory. I still clearly remembered that just like the old times, he jumped on me and licked my face fervently. But I leaned backwards, nearly tumbled down, as
he's finally become a real handsome adult, so huge and much heavier than me. I told him I would pick him up back to my family and build a kennel for him at the backyard. But I was so stupid; no, I didn't. I flew to Singapore, then HK, just to further my study but left him lonely out there. Just a few months ago, on the regular phone call back to my mum, she told silently that he passed away in a newly-built warm kennel just after he arrived at his home a week ago. But I was so stupid and it was just too late to say goodbye to him.

I stay immortally far away from him. But that distance in my memory is no longer exists, just as he lives forever in my memory.
When she was small

When she was small, she encountered something she would never forget in the rest of her life. It was not something important for most of the people. It was not something people would treat it seriously. It was only something boys would like it.

She loved bus, the big, giant vehicle that bought her back to her home. It was like her shelter when she was waiting under a small umbrella in rain. It was like she bed when she was really, really tired.

It was like all her life at that time.

However, you will never know your next move. Or, you may say, you will never know, you slowly give up something you treat it really important.

The girl later grew up. She left her childhood memory in her deep, deep mind. There was nothing called bus any more in her life. Everything was changing, and she was no doubt, changing. The Earth was still moving and spinning as usual, but she changed.

She nearly forgot how she loved her favourite bus. She tried different things. She learnt different subjects. She knew different knowledge. Everything bought her to heaven, maybe better than the original habit she had when she was small.

Everything looked beautiful, but everything looked so unfamiliar. They were like miles away from her life, the life she originated to hold, to grab, in her hands.

They missed one thing in common. They had no souls inside.

Reality makes us face the truth of life. You always want to owe something you think which is vital, essential in your life, but you cannot. Simply is, your hands cannot hold too much, or, in fact, you cannot even grab a bit of it.

She stood in front of the bus she loved for years. It was the bus in orange and white colours, running in the same route.

'Mum, can I take a picture with it?'

'No, it's gone.'
She turned around. There was nothing in front of her, only starlight slowly rising towards the sky. Nothing was left there.

And she found out she was no longer a kid, she had fully grown up already.

Looking back, there is nothing left, only childhood, the most innocent memories in childhood. However, it is gone. It is like sand, drifting away from your fingers. The beautiful days you had in your childhood, but you never treasured it. Now, it leaves you. You want to keep it, but you do not have the power, or ability, to make it stay.

She regretted. She said she still loved it, but it did not wait for her. It was gone, far far away from her. She thought she still have time. Yet, time never waited. It was gone, then it was gone. Nothing could be used to keep time staying here.

She had to look forward. There was nothing left for her now, only scattered memories in her mind. Sometimes she could not even take out her memories in her mind, and read it. They were buried deeply.

People always say ‘We still have time’ and continue to do nothing about their lives. However, time does not wait. Chances lose and it is too late to realize your fault. Everything is gone without a trace, not even a bit left. People still keep saying the same line, though they know there is not much time left.

‘Don’t wait, don’t try to leave your love. One day if you want to find it, you will find out, there is nothing for you to trace. Not a bit.’

She said to herself.

I will never wait. Never, ever wait, again.
Acquaintance

Tong Ka Chun, Tony

Please mind the doors! Bi bi bi bi bi bi’ I walked inside the snow white light rail compartment. My left hand was holding on the yellow poles while my right hand was holding my girlfriend Stephanie. With the bright lightings in the train, I looked at the young girl sitting at the last row of the seats; I revived a scene in my mind.

I remembered the weather was good on that day: the sky was clear and a few clouds were moving slowly. I was a secondary school student, living in a housing estate F at that time. Like any other days of my life, I surfed on internet to look at entertainment news on Yahoo. Suddenly, I realized that one of my books needed to be returned as the book was already overdue. I rushed to the town centre to return the book. After that, I went to the light rail stop to wait for the train to go back home. The train arrived at the station slowly and I stepped into the compartment and looked for seats. At the end of the train, the seats were facing each other, like the booth seats without tables. There was one man seating at the left and I chose an individual seat at the door side as I could look at the scenery through the window. When I sat down, I found out that there was a girl sitting opposite to me. She was a student of the school located at the opposite side of the road to my school. She was Stephanie.

I glanced at her and looked outside the window. This is route 751 to Y. Please mind the doors.’ The door closed. ‘Ding!’ Like a roller coaster, the train climbed up the slope. The electric poles passed one after the other. The stations, trees and the people on the platform became further and further away from me. The objects became smaller and smaller and finally disappeared. The train moved slowly when it crossed a river. The sun was fiery. The waves glinted, like a heap of diamond granules under the quartz lamp. The river was endless, like a conveyer belt, moving the water towards the end of the sky. The cramped buildings at the side of the river were golden in colour, the mosaic on them shined like the wheat grains of the cereal glasses. The scenery was gorgeous, even though it made my eyes squint; I still looked outside the
window. The train turned at the junction and the scenery changed from a river to factory buildings. The sunlight withdrew and the industrial areas were dim and grey. As the train was brighter than outside, the young girl’s silhouette was reflected on the glass window. I looked at her through the glass of the window. She was looking outside but she did not realize who I was looking. But soon she noticed my gaze and turned to look into my eyes. I was discovered. It seems that I was exposed to the crime that I have committed. It was too sudden, we turned our heads at the same time and we looked at each other. That’s the first time I looked into her eyes. Through her square lenses, her round and big eyes are under the black plastic glass flame. Her hair is black, wearing a ponytail while her face is cherubic. She has an oval face, with puffy and rosy cheeks, and a little chin.

The moment of embarrassment followed. We averted our eyes. She looked outside of the window and I looked on the floor. She was wearing school uniform. Her dress could cover up to her knee, but could not cover the lustre of her legs. The surface was as white as milk. Smooth as silk, the legs were shinier than pearls. Glittering and translucent, the shanks were covered by a layer of frost. They told you to use your hands to stroke them softly and lightly, to give appreciation to the tenderness of the skin. It is a sin to touch it as you would be afraid of destroying this fragile sculpture.

The train passed by the factory. The sunbeam shined in the compartment again. The train passed one building after the other. The sunlight shined and was blocked while her face appeared and disappeared on the window. The window was just like a frame, enclosed a painting which had her face put onto different backgrounds. Her face with a cement background made her cool while her face with a flowery garden made her charming. It was like the process of showing projector slices which was printed with different photos on it.

The train moved very fast. Very soon, I had arrived at S. I stood up and turned. The passengers standing in front of me were horses behind the gate, they stepped their legs on the platform after the train doors were moving apart. The men and women at my back, together with me, moved out of the train. On the platform, the passengers moved their eyeballs up and down, staring at the seats in the train. They were the athletes on the sports field, ready to
squeeze themselves into the carriage. I was in the crowd, who were fighting to
put their purse on the card sensor as quick as they can. Ding!’ I turned my
head, wished to have a last look at her, but the train was moving away from the
station. The image of the train is opaque and what I can see clearly was three
bright orange numbers 751 at the back of the train. I stood on the platform,
watching the train leaving the station.

I looked at the floor when I walked to the feeder bus stop to F. I
scolded myself, ‘why did I get off at S? Why didn’t I stay on the train for more
stations?’ ‘What a pity!’ Passing the corner, I recognized the sight of her back.
She was there, waiting in the queue! She turned her head with her ponytail, and
looked at me, with her mouth curved upwards. I smiled at her. ‘You live in F?’

‘Who are you looking at? Are you looking at the girls?’ A suspicious
interrogative voice awakens me. It was from Stephanie.

Wearing a smiling face, I was shocked and opened my eyes widely.

‘Of course not, my baby. I was just thinking of something.’ I said.

‘What are you thinking of then?’ She gazed at me with her soppy
eyeballs and asked.

‘I am thinking of you.’
My First Love

Submerging in a huge depressive flood
When my poor exam result I received,
I cried. It's he who gave me comforts 'n cheers.
In front of him, I knew I can't deceive.

I've never deeply been in love before.
As every part of him's like sparkles, my eyes
Cannot be off him. He is like the Plough
In darkness in which your direction lies.

His actual feelings once revealed. I was
Entirely shocked by the fact that I knew
Who she is. I could not stop asking why
It's her not me, who's shining in his view.

I was desperate to knock on his door,
To tell him where my genuine passion lies.
But I retreated since I knew I would
Inevitably fail to make myself fly.
Love me

Teo Li Chuan, Junyce

All I could see were scribbles of words on a scrape of yellowish paper. The words were strangers to me and vice versa, for I was only five. Staring into the blank paper, I wonder why Atuk stop at the well in Malacca. Atuk then broke the silence and said it with a thin smile, ‘Your nenek wrote it in 1923 and I keep it in my wallet ever since.’

‘But it’s torn…’ I replied.

Atuk shook his head slightly. ‘Boy, you might not understand, but a long, long time ago, Nenek’s papa didn’t like me, but I love your nenek so.’

Of all the matters that he had ever forgotten, his memory with Nenek is an exception. He recalled like it had just happened.

Nenek’s papa disliked Atuk for he was yellow-skinned, as well as a typical Coolie. How can Atuk be compatible with his anak sayang? Nenek’s papa soon became the wall between them, attempting to push them further apart. Therefore, they had this crazy plan to meet and run away together. To a newly developing city named Singapura where everything started from scratch. Atuk proposed to Nenek and Singapura seemed like the place which was tailor-made for them to live forever.

‘Is that why we are living in Singapore now?’ I said, feeling absolutely sure about the answer.

‘Yes, but not that soon.’ Atuk responded while walking around the well. I was puzzled.

Nenek did not turn up at the well that day. But nailed to the well was this note that I found. This is what it said.

‘This note must be worth some money’ I thought to myself.

Nenek has just passed away. Atuk and I came back to this well where me and Atuk stopped to pray. This time, Atuk did not talk like he used to. After the long silence, and after so many years, I finally asked.
‘Atuk, how did you and Nenek end up being together again?’

I could tell that he was not in the mood to talk about it. But I was ready to listen to him this time.

‘On this very date 09/09, your nenek finally show up here.’ Atuk recalled. ‘But she was dressed in a baju pengantin instead.’

‘To marry you?’ Eager to know why.

Not me, but someone else. She was to be married to a Datuk by the arrangement of your nenek’s papa. However, with your nenek’s strong will of personality, she was unwilling to give in to destiny and so she ran away.’

Nenek took the chance to escape and finally met atuk at the well. Both of them eloped to Singapore and got married on the same day on 09/09.

‘Do you wonder what 09/09 meant to us?’ Atuk questioned.

I answered without hesitation, ‘The day you and Nenek got together.’

‘Not only that. Nine carries the meaning of longevity,’ Atuk added.

‘A longevity of love,’ a thought that flashed through my mind.

‘But…’ Atuk continued.

Atuk took the note out again.

‘…it is also the day she leaves us.’

I know I have never seen him cry in all my fifteen years. But as he said these words to Nenek, his eyes fill up with tears.

‘If you get there before I do,
Don’t give up on me.
I’ll meet you when my chores are through,
I don’t know how long I’ll be.
But I’m not gonna let you down.
Darling wait and see
And between now and then
Till I see you again
I’ll be loving you
Love, Me.’

It has become a note to my Nenek in Heaven and a vow from Atuk on Earth. This note has finally shuttered my heart. It is not merely a crumbling piece of paper. It is a symbol of love containing an eternal vow that breaks
through boundary. Be it Nenek's papa or Heaven and Earth, nothing could
defeat the power of love from the message here. This longevity of nine
continues its stretch of love from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven.

'I'll be loving you,

Love, me…’

This note is worth much more than money.
Poems

Aftr d protes

Now dat ratty
Hav no fear,
Escapd dos policemen
Both far an near,
So dey cant grab him
By d ear,
Hes safe on d watr
Dat much is clear,
But best of all
You may cheer,
Is he's now sippin
An ice cold beer

For Bethune

Ther is a house in jordan,
its a diffrent kind of space
an though it was built
for only twenty souls,
they got sixty in dat place

My employer nevr

2 Reference to Bethune House, (established in 1986) which is a shelter for abused migrant workers, specifically women from Indonesia, the Philippines and South Asia. Bethune House is located in South Kowloon, Hong Kong.
paid my wage,
his wife she beat me too
so now we live in Jordan,
an sing this song for you

The judge in court
he spoke to me,
as if I couldn't see
he said, people only love the rich,
an justice isn't free

I wish one day they'd listen
an hear the story I hav to tell
I wish one day they'd look at me,
an not jus the color of my skin

Back home the politicians,
love the money that we all send,
they tell us wer all heros,
a case they mus defend

So I am a migrant worker,
I been put down and abused,
I been passed ovr,
kicked around an stared at,
an lest you be amused
now I'll tell you jus one mor thing,
before yer precious time is used
I still got my dignity,
So don't you ever ever get confused
When You're Gone...

Chow Yik Ling Elaine

Elizabeth, I've got something to tell you.' At that time, I have just come back from the studio and all I want to do is to take a shower and go to bed. 'Honey, can't we talk about that tomorrow? I'm really tired.' I go straight to the bathroom and bang the door, without hugging him or looking at him...

'Good morning, my love...' I turn off the alarm clock in my mobile and sit on the bed. I have got a strange feeling. I look at the side where John lies. It is just normal that he is gone when I wake up. Yes, it is just normal. It is already 5 o'clock in the afternoon. I have to go to the studio again. When I am at work, I still feel something strange happening, but I have to concentrate on rehearsing my script. I look out of the window by chance. When I look down, I seem to see John leaving; but it is just not possible because his office is far away from here. Anyway, I have to start my rehearsal; even my heart aches a little bit.

An exhausting day today! 'Darling, I'm back!' My voice echoes in the house. I do not think our house is that big. Maybe he is sleeping. I do not want to sleep right now, so I just sit down and watch TV. I remember a few years ago, when I was not that busy, we used to sit by the TV at night and eat pizza and fries or whatever. I seldom cook for him; it is him who cooks for me. What did he cook for us tonight? I go to the fridge but find nothing. He may want to take a rest sometimes. Suddenly I feel very uneasy and somehow I can hardly breathe. I run upstairs and rush to the bedroom. The bed is very tidy and neat...with no one on it. I immediately call him. 'The number you’ve dialed cannot be connected at this moment, please try again later.' Where is he? I look for him everywhere in the house and keep on dialing.

It is already 3 o'clock in the morning. Actually, I came home early tonight. I would like to share with him about my day. John often talks to me about what happened in the office. I sit on the bed after he has gone. The face I come to know is missing. Every piece of my heart is missing him. I can't look for him tomorrow. I've to go to the studio.' I walk slowly to the wardrobe to get changed. He must have taken some of his clothes away. I touch gently...
one of his T-shirts and hug it tightly. I feel like my tears are dropping on his breast.

I cannot sleep. I have never felt this way before. It is winter now, but it seems very chilly in the room and on the bed. When we were married, he said in his oath that 'We are made for each other out here forever.' and I swore that 'Everything I do, I'd give my heart and soul.' Where is my heart and soul? I walk to the window and look out. There is a beam of sunlight coming in and some birds are singing. I call him.

I must.

'Please leave your message after the tone.'

'My love, I miss you. Time is like years when you're gone.'

He may be far away. How many steps has he taken? I have never counted his steps when he comes back or walks away...I decide to paint the words 'Come back' on the front wall of the house. I hope he can see them and be by my side again. Then, I drive to the studio.

A few days pass and still he is gone.

When I am back, I see some words on the wall. 'I'm ok. I miss you.' I sprint and open the door.

'I love you.'
I close my door and sit on my bed. I look at the prize in my hand and wonder if what just happened was a beautiful dream. In the banquet room in Grand Hyatt Hotel, I went up the stage and received the ‘Outstanding Executive Award’ with a burst of applause. It was undoubtedly recognition of my efforts. During the past few years, I concentrated on my work without any leisure or enjoyment because I clearly knew my target, a successful business woman. Yes, I have kept my promise but my father has not.

It was so noisy in the bedroom and it seemed like father and mother were arguing again. The situation had continued for several weeks. However, everytime I asked father ‘What is happening between you and mum? Have I done something wrong?’ He just gave me a gentle smile and hit my small head lightly without saying a word. After another ‘several weeks’, I didn’t know why he didn’t show up sometimes like at the family breakfast on Sunday morning. One day, father packed all his belongings and left the house. At that time, I noticed father and mother were separated. I met father every single month later on. We went to theme parks, we watched films and we had tasty food etc. I didn’t know the problem between them; he let me know nothing. I knew because he loved me. So I never ask the question afterwards. Once when we were sitting on the park bench, ‘What is your dream, my dear daughter?’ he asked me suddenly. ‘I want to be a successful person! Just like you! Dad!’ I replied with no hesitation. He gave a grin and then hugged me with tears.

I look at the teddy bear right beside me. I remember when I still lived in a ‘complete’ family, father used to tuck me in at night and I needed to hold the teddy bear he gave me tightly or I could not sleep well at night. When he was diagnosed with stomach cancer five years ago, I took the teddy bear and visited him every day. He promised me that he would get well soon. Even though he got thinner and thinner day by day, I still believe he could make it through whatever since he was so strong in my mind and what was more important, he had promised me; but I was wrong.
I struggled so hard in these years, tonight I got the award and I become a successful person but he never get a chance to see what I have become. Mother just phoned me and said she is going to hold a big party for me. I wish he was here to celebrate together despite it won't come true forever.

It has been five years after he passed away. I never knew I could hurt like this though everyday life goes on. I wish I could talk to him for awhile. I miss him but I try not to cry as time goes by. It is true he has reached a better place, still I would give the world to see his face and right here next to him. But it's like he is gone too soon, now the hardest thing to do is say bye bye...
Where Are We Heading?

Chen Liyan Mandy

‘This way please,’ said a young lady with an exaggerated smile. She had big eyes and high cheekbones. Her hair was dyed yellowish brown and curled. She was dressed in bright red full-length cheongsam with a white fur cape, wearing green eye shadow.

She was in her late twenties, I guessed.

Flaring neon lights randomly decorated the dull black marble wall. Faintly lighted, the corridor released city people from the stressful incandescent light. The width between walls was just enough for three people a row. Christine, Juliet and I followed closely behind the young lady. Christine was calm as usual; Juliet’s eyes showed her euphoria; I held Christine’s right arm a bit more tightly, trying to smother my slight nervousness; Maggie trailed a few steps behind; Yang and Dennis, the only two boys, were chatting. I overheard their conversation.

‘Wow! Must be expensive, huh?’ said the tall boy Yang.

‘Happy hour is a part of our Qingyuan trip. Christine would not care about paying hundreds more dollars,’ replied Dennis in a teasing tone. I could feel pleasure streamed out with his words; his handsome face must be lighted with excitement; his undersized body must shake slightly with exhilaration.

‘You mean we’re lucky to have Christine...’ Yang stopped. No more words! I felt a bit weird when he said her name. Only after that night did I understand why.

We were led and headed deeper. Along the corridor laughter and singing burst out behind every single door; oily and drunken faces of middle-aged men vaguely showed on the glass panel set in doors or from the seam of a half-open door; waiters in black waistcoats trimmed with tinsel and waitresses in bright cheongsam hurried in and out those doors serving food and drinks. Seeing we six passing by, they vigorously said ‘Welcome to Grand Royal Nightclub.’
We made several turns and came to a quieter and duskier corridor. Then we stopped in front of one of the last doors. The door was painted gold, sparkling. An oval glass panel was set in with a gold frame, dazzling. A golden handle was installed at the height of eighty centimeters or so, shining. The young lady turned the handle. The door opened.

A delicate crystal chandelier hung high in the middle of the ceiling. The walls were papered lavishly in gold. Illuminated by the glaring chandelier, the whole room radiated extravagance and luxury. The room was divided into two parts: a main entertainment area—with a glass table, an upholstered sofa which could hold more than ten people and a complete set of karaoke equipment a few meters away from the sofa; a small rest area, built a bit higher than the main part—with a couch and two arm chairs which were set closer and a wooden table. In addition, the room had an individual toilet, a refrigerator and calling bells all around.

Christine went in first, stable; I let out a big and loud 'Wow,' surprised; Juliet, close behind, was shocked with her mouth wide open and her eyes unusually bulging; even the taciturn Maggie said 'Splendid.'

The two boys entered the room. Yang walked to the sofa at a leisurely pace as he always did, and took a seat in a devil-may-care fashion. His act reminded me of those bedtime discussions about boys we often had. Girls often said, 'Yang was indeed a man of stable character!' Most of the time, he seemed to downplay his emotions, kept calm and silent and fixed his eyes with his lips a little tight. But a flush of excitement suffused his face when he entered the room. Dennis was a totally different kind. Raised eyebrows, sparkling bright eyes, a crescent mouth and dimpled cheeks—his handsome face showed his entire excitement. He was so gladdened that it seemed his feet floated over the ground. He walked around the room at a brisk pace, looking at all the facilities with amazed and satisfied smiles.

'Wow! Here's a bit too over for us.' Juliet said in a loud voice after the young lady left.

This is my first time... I mean entering a nightclub... and...er... such a splendid one. I think it's quite over! 'I was too excited, or maybe too nervous.
Maggie said: 'Yep! Really over! Pretty splendid! Quite wonderful! I can’t wait to play karaoke!' This was a new Maggie. The Maggie I had seldom seen. It was a Maggie on a real high!

'Want some drinks? How about beer? Or wine? Anyone want to try liquor?' Christine scanned the menu and asked what the other five wanted.

'Ask for dice and poker as well,' Dennis jumped in.

Yang said nothing. He just sat beside Christine, fixed his eyes on the menu while Christine turned it and helped to order food. Juliet and Maggie were in paradise, selecting songs in front of the screen. Dennis joined them, adding more laughter. Feeling uncomfortable about sitting alone, I joined the buzz as well.

Rapidly, the uneasy feeling of entering such a place, beyond our age, vanished.

Thirty minutes later, all of us were extremely excited.

'Maggie, I never know you are such a MQ!' I yelled out in the loud music.

'What does MQ mean?' Yang asked, using his powerful and rich baritone.

'Microphone Queen!' answered Maggie excitedly and continued singing her song.

Juliet couldn’t stand her microphone being occupied and yelled out, 'Drop her song!' She was always the MQ when we had a middle-school reunion. But Maggie, the new member, rocked the room that night.

While Juliet and Dennis were busying selecting their songs and managing to put theirs before Maggie’s, Christine and I sat on the smaller sofa of the main entertainment area, the one farther from the door, leaving the main place for the new MQ. We chatted. We ate. We drank as well.

Christine ordered several dishes of fried food, three bottles of wine, two plates of fruit and a dozen beers. She placed five goblets on the glass table, held the wine professionally and poured each one two-fifths full. Then she turned to me and said: 'Cheers for our nineteen!

Cheers for our release from middle school! Damn Gaokao!' I replied, holding my goblet high in the air.
Christine drank her wine in one gulp. I took mine, hesitated, held it up and smelt. The strong smell of alcohol made me frown and shiver. I turned to Christine. She smiled. Her soft and warm smile was just like the one sent by a big sister encouraging her dear little sis to try makeup—uncomfortable the first time but could mean a lot later on. I took one sip, nearly spat it out and finally swallowed it, awkwardly. Only because of the high price did I let that crimson liquid burn my throat.

'I feel I am ruining my esophagus by drinking this,' I complained and stuck out my tongue showing my dislike.

Christine chuckled. She poured more into her own goblet, put it to her lips and took one sip after another, gracefully. The same crimson liquid flew down her esophagus. Her throat twisted rhythmically.

'It tastes horrible. Is it pleasant to you?' asked I.

'No...Never!'

'Then why? You have drunk enjoyably.'

'It helps...at least it did.'

'Helps what?'

'To simplify the world.'

'Huh?'

'You will learn that...by yourself,' murmured Christine.

Her words confused me. I added some Sprite into my goblet and created a light pink drink, adorable. It was just the color on Christine's cheeks—pinky. It was just the taste I wanted—sweet and tasty. Only after that night did I realize that I was the only one who enjoyed that sweet taste—tasty but childish.

Yang listened, sitting on Christine's right side, silent. Maggie, Juliet and Dennis didn't like the taste of wine, so they only drank beer. Two hours later, we added another dozen. All of our face, six faces, flushed, either because of excitement and joy or because of alcohol.

We drank. We sang. We laughed. We revelled in the freedom of being nineteen—a physically mature age.

When the two hands of clock overlapped at the number twelve, we were as happy as at high tide.
I joined the crazy karaoke team. Dennis and I sang the male voices while Juliet and Maggie did the female part. We four enjoyed ourselves in all kinds of love songs which were old, familiar and long-lasting. We sang in turns; and when we were not singing, we danced; and when we felt tired, we drank. We were totally in a state of euphoria.

Christine and Yang were drinking silently. Wine occupied their mouths. One mouthful after another. One glassful after another. No Sprite! Neat wine filled their throats. At first only a slight pink flushed their face; then the pink turned brighter; few glassfuls later, crimson suffused the two faces; and then spread and spread until their ears flamed.

None of us had noticed that Yang and Christine shifted to the small rest area, darker and quieter. When Juliet found they two were in the corner, Christine was already so drunk that she lay down on Yang’s lap.

This sudden big news dragged Juliet back into life from her sleepiness and light drunkenness. She whispered to me.

I said harshly to Juliet: ‘I don’t care what they are doing. I don’t even want to know. It’s personal.’ I hated her gossiping about my best friend Christine.

‘Yang’s my good buddy while Christine’s hers,’ Dennis expressed himself, not showing whether he wanted to know more or not.

‘Do they both have lovers?’ Maggie jumped into the conversation, missing her lyric.

Juliet, Dennis and I nodded. Taidly!

‘Wait for me,’ Juliet dropped her words. She walked to the glass table, picked up her goblet and went around the sofa. She took the longer way back to us and tried to prick up her ears when passing by Yang and Christine. All of these were done carefully and pretending to be insouciant.

Shock... Big news... Marvelous... I can’t bear my excitement... ’ Juliet uttered all wonderful adjectives she could use to show her astonishment.

Say it! Do not keep us guessing! ’ Dennis couldn’t control his curiosity.

‘Yang said... ’ Juliet paused and signed us to gather closer. Dennis approached at once. Maggie stretched her neck. I felt that my inner self fixed my feet into the ground while my upper body leaned slightly closer, leading me to evil.
Yang said: ‘...why you dumped me and chose Nivax...’ I could only catch so much!

So... they were recalling their love memories? When did it happen?’ My mouth opened automatically.

‘As far as I know, they did not develop a love relationship,’ Dennis stated.

Juliet said: ‘I have heard of it. I could remember. In Junior 2. Only a kind of shady affairs.’ She craned her head around trying to search for the newest progress.

‘Now it’s my turn.’ Dennis played a similar trick.

‘Yang put her fingers into Christine’s hair... Face to face...’ Again Dennis described what he saw. No comments!

‘That’s not morally acceptable, I think,’ said I.

‘Let me go!’ Maggie walked faster, not even trying to pretend.

‘Oh Lord! Maggie was clumsy. She’s interrupting,’ Dennis tried to lower his voice but still completely showed his temper in tone.

‘They say nothing...Face to face... The same expression on both faces...Their eyes were sparkling with...AFFECTION...I can tell...Yang is still smoothing Christine’s fine hair with his own ten fingers and even fondling Christine’s face...And even lower his face to Christine, not kissing, but a kind of...I DON’T KNOW!’ Maggie described in a detailed way. She felt a bit frustrated in failing to find a suitable adjective.

‘They are moving from spiritual love to sensual pleasure? That is...’ Juliet tried to search one but failed as well.

‘That is getting out of control!’ Dennis picked up the words where Juliet left off to tell.

‘Christine must be totally drunk,’ I couldn’t smother my unease. She’s indulging herself.’

‘That’s not the first time for them,’ Juliet claimed.

‘Tell it!’ Dennis hurried Juliet.

In Junior 2...On a weekend, as I was told, Christine didn’t go back home. They two, Yang and Christine, brought beer...Several bottles...GOT DRUNK! Christine was depressed...It was said that she didn’t get along well with Navix...So she let herself drink a lot...and finally got as drunk as a lord.
They two hugged...tightly maybe...and Christine leaned on Yang, closely...Christine had told me after that...she said, ‘Alcohol helps...you gain courage from getting a bit drunk...when people think you get drunk but you just feel a bit dizzy, then you can do things without considering the results...’ Christine really thinks alcohol helps to simplify her world...’

‘Wow!’ Maggie’s mouth wide opened.

‘That’s too much for me,’ said I.

‘Let’s just sing our songs,’ I suggested, trying to drag the other three out of that mess. The other three agreed and joined in the high energy again. We drank more as we sang more. Dizziness and blush led us to a more exhilarating state.

Suddenly, Christine, held tightly by Yang, walked unstably and headed to the toilet. On her halfway, she threw up. Covering her own mouth, she rushed into the toilet, left a trail of vomit. Make everyone SICK! Yang knocked at the door of the toilet, tried to get inside and help. The door didn’t open. Yang frowned, worrying. We four were all shocked by what we had seen. Juliet covered her own mouth too. Maggie turned down the music after being blank for several seconds. Dennis, with his eyeballs bulging, bit his lower lip. Flurried, I hurried to ring the bell, finding help.

Christine opened the door a few minutes later. She showed and grinned to all the others. Her eyes were crescent-shaped due to the alcohol. She walked out from the toilet and let a young lady in to clean the mess. Yang stepped out quickly and grasped Christine’s left arm fast and held her tightly, trying to balance her. Christine shook off Yang’s hands, mumbling a few words, ‘I can walk myself!’ She insisted. Yang let go. Christine stretched out her arms like a bird, tried to balance herself and walk in a line.

We four, except Yang and Christine, were astonished. It was not the Christine we had known for six years. Christine was totally different. It was another Christine before my eyes. It was a Christine I had never seen. It was a Christine—drunk, out of mind.

Yang followed Christine’s unstable steps closely and finally helped her to the sofa.
Christine threw up two or three more times that night. Others were more or less drunk.

Around two o'clock, Christine's Dad sent us his chauffeur. Lit by the bright orange streetlamps, we were all in the car, tipsy, drunken, or even unconscious.

I woke up with a start halfway and asked: 'Where are we heading?'

'Don't worry. Trust your driver!' said the chauffeur.

Yeah...I have to. We have to. We are qualified physically, but not mentally.
Grandfather talked very loudly.
He bellowed as he
erentered the village gate.
When I heard him,
I rushed out
grabbed his shopping basket.

Smart in dark Mao suit,
taking care to tug between his toes,
the holes
in his socks
a basket in hand
in sunshine or in rain
he marched to the market,
without fail!
Never did I ask,
why he kept on wearing those holey socks!

A studious pupil in everyway,
he practiced writing everyday,
filling up his exercise book
with pages and pages of
his name
in his scrawny childish hand.
Never did I ask,
Why he kept on writing his name!

Grandfather talked very loudly,
boasting to his friends,
about his clever grandchildren.
His voice still clear in my head.

To all his grandchildren he was fair,
each got what was needed and no more.

He would not buy me toys!
He would not buy me sweets!
But never was I in need
of a pen or a book.

He would not buy me toys!
He would not buy me sweets!
But if I ever fell asleep
on the settee,
He gently carried me to bed.

When I left for London,
He did not come to see me off.
He smoothed his face
With wrinkly hand,
Wiped away the sadness in his heart
Tears he would not shed!

By the time I went to university,
he had joined his wife
lying deep in the hills.
I was sure,
he would have been so proud,
had he been around.
I wanted to hear him once more
'This one's the clever one!'
As he used to boast.
But what I wanted to hear the most was his stories of why he kept wearing his holey socks, why he kept on writing his name, why he would not shed his tears - all the things he did not want to talk about!
Another Sunday at Church

Yau Chun Fai Joseph

She wore browline glasses and beamed towards me with a grin when I sat down on the pew next to her. I was, of course, late and the sermon had already begun, so I had to squeeze through the narrow and congested isle between the benches to reach the remaining empty seat. The devout that came early were decidedly unhappy to retract their legs or move sideways uncomfortably, especially for a plain looking late comer. One gave me a menacing stare; another gave out an audible sigh. So when I finally sat down and noticed that she was smiling at me, I immediately formed a favourable impression of her.

Quickly settling down, I started to study this happy lady. Long and lustrous black hair flowed to her shoulders and waved from side to side when she nodded in agreement with pastor. She had large brown eyes, and a chiseled nose, delicate, thin and high. Her lips were of perfect shape, and gleamed with a natural and booming red, half hiding the pearly teeth behind. She was indeed pretty. And since I was a boy, I began to contemplate an excuse to introduce myself to her.

Then I heard faint whispering. 'You were dead in your transgressions and sins... all of us have gratified our cravings of sinful nature... do not be strangled by sin for it is death unto you...'. Apparently, she was reciting, under her breath, Ephesians 2. There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong about memorizing scripture during a soporific sermon. But something was amiss. She nodded her head too frequently; her posture too stiff and upright to be comfortable. The fingers were clenched into fists. The passage she murmured was about sin and death. And she was repeating it. Oh crap! My mind started to wonder what these little signs actually meant. I imagined her taking a kitchen knife out of her hand bag and slitting her throat from side to side, blood splattering all over my face, wives screaming in horror and husbands dashing to their aid. Then I would stare in shock as she slumped onto the pew, guilty that I did not act before. Worse, my proximity to her would make me the first
unwitting victim of a murderous rampage against the Church. Why is her jacket so bulky? Should I throw a Bible at her and flee? Why am I not telling someone about her right now?

Then all of a sudden I was startled by a touch on the shoulder. I turned my head slowly. She was staring at me. I gulped. ‘Hurry! Confess your sins you sinner. You have committed the unforgivable sin. You have c-o-m-m-i-t-t-e-d the unforgivable sin. You will die before this year is out. Find a pastor and confess now, NOW. You will die before this year is out.’ I blinked, not knowing how to respond. She continued to stare at me. But she had already raised her voice sufficiently for people nearby to hear clearly. A man sitting beside me stood up and made a signaling gesture to one of the ushers. Concerned, the pastor stopped delivering brim stone and fire as the eyes of the congregation were transfixed on this odd disruption. Finally, I was saved.
蓴麻菜湯

是火燒一般的葉子
曾經灼傷採摘的手掌
是我們戰時的貧窮
煮成今日的從容
是親人的颠沛流離
煮成懷舊湯羹的家常
是我們山邊的針葉
煮成今日的甜美

是切膚的傷痛
煮成今日的遺忘
是巨大臃腫的理想
煮成粉飾的芥末
是失愛的苦惱
煮成淡淡微笑
是狂暴的自棄
煮成脆弱的希望

是我紡竹的腳下
是你摸索的衣裳
是我們父母的憂患
是我們兒女的未來
細碎也不細碎
完整也未嘗不完整
解我們百年的愁
解我們千載的渴

仍有戰火在蔓延
仍有誰的姊妹被殺戮
仍有人活在監獄中
仍有人失去她的至愛
頹垣敗壁的碎石
上面有難忍的印記
我們可把一切磨成粉末
煮成一窩鮮綠的濃湯？
Brenessselsuppe

P.K. Leung
(Translated by Helen Leung)

These scorching leaves
once scalded the hands that picked them
It’s our poverty during wartime
cooked into today’s ease
it’s the homeless wandering of our family
cooked into memories of homely comfort
It’s the pine needles from our mountains
cooked into today’s sweetness

It’s pain bone deep
cooked into today’s forgetting
It’s massive swollen ideals
cooked into mustard for garnish
It’s the grief of love lost
cooked into wan smiles
It’s violent self-abandonment
cooked into fragile hopes

It’s my bamboo village
it’s your modest clothing
it’s our parents’ fears
it’s our children’s future
so fragmented these fragments
yet complete in its incompleteness
to soothe years of our sadness
to quench centuries of our thirst

there are wars still raging
there’s someone’s sisters being killed
there are lives in poverty
there's someone’s true love being lost
such unbearable marks left
on the bricks of these ruins
can we grind them fine
to cook a rich green soup?
I arrived at the canteen at 8:30. Isabella was not there. At 8:45, I call her but no one answered. I went to the lecture theatre and chose a seat at the back. I reserved a seat next to me, for her. I call her, again, the result was just the same. My classmates came into the lecture theatre, one by one. The lecture theatre was almost full. People began to ask me whether my seat was available or not. Feeling ashamed, I told them that there was someone to occupy. There was a girl, rushed into the theatre. She did not have a tall figure but with a little baby fat. The brownish hair didn’t suit her and her eyes were not big. I had no intention to connect the word ‘beauty’ with her. Nipping a large travel bag, she came in front of me and pointed at the seat. She gasped, ‘Can I... sit here?’

I looked around, saw there was no other seating available. Isabella would not come to lesson. I nodded my head.

Her name was Chloe.

'We will have a group project and the topics are on the WebCT. You need to group yourselves in pairs.' The professor raises his tone and announced.

Shall we be in a group?’ the girl asked.

Err... OK!’

She twisted her body, grabbed a pen and wrote down something on my notes. When she drew her hand back, the round and cute characters C-H-L-O-E, her MSN address and phone number appeared at the left hand corner of my notes.

The lesson ended at 11.30. Saying goodbye to my classmates, I walked behind the crowd and made a call to Isabella.

'Morning, Isa’

'Morning, where are you? Let’s have something to eat’

‘OK. Then I wait for you at the canteen.’

‘Bye’
There was no sound from her side. I looked at the screen of the cell phone, the conversation had already come to an end.

Wearing a pair of sandal, her skinny figure, brown curly hair, and long legs appeared in front of me.

'This morning...' I said.

'I want to eat soy-sauce chicken. What do you want?'

She seemed she didn’t remember that we should have a breakfast this morning. Getting her parcel from her handbag, she took a hundred dollar note from her parcel and got to the counter. I was looking at the billboard, ignored, to see what to eat.

'Are you feeling unwell?' I asked.

'No. I have a training last night.' Bending her head, she looked and pressed on her brand new iPhone.

'How is it going, the annual performance?'

'Quite nice.'

'I have a lot of essays to hand in this week, I will be in trouble, I think.'

'Hm... I am also busy. Work Hard,' she murmured, putting a spoon of rice in her mouth.

Chloe added me in her MSN contact list after that day. Then she started to chat with me. We talked about the group project at first. Then we started to talk about our classmates. We talked about what we think about the college. We talked about our attitude towards life, money and of course, love. We told our 'love history' to each other. She laughed at me and said I did not understand what girls thought. She knew that I was unhappy with Isabella and she taught me some strategies to make a girl happy. When I appeared online, she gave a short message 'hello' and then we had a long conversation. I didn’t know the reason why I could tell to her everything; express my happiness without any pressure. One day, she told me on MSN that she had to eat instant noodle in the hostel after every Wednesday lesson. Isabella always skipped that lesson and I was left alone to have lunch, so I typed, 'let’s have lunch, shall we?'. She replied 'OK.' On Wednesday, I wore a pair of worn-out jeans to have lesson and got her to have lunch. Chloe walked towards me and we walked up the step to the exit. Oh! Isabella was here, sitting at the last row of the theatre,
looking at her and me. I found that I was a poor student who was caught by
the teacher. That was not my fault. What had done by me? It is my freedom to
have lunch with anyone. I suddenly became angry, said to her, coldly 'I will
have lunch with Chloe.'

'Would you like to take a stroll with me?'
She gave me a short glance, after hesitating a moment, she agreed.

Soon we were walking side by side along the river. Among the trees, we
would hear birds singing everywhere. Chloe began skipping and running and I
took after her, jumping and running in the same way. Though I had detected
that she is not slim, I must admit that her body is light and pleasing.

Isabella was being jealous since then. She was indignant with me and
constantly sought reasons to justify her indignation. She blamed me for
everything that was hard in her situation.

'I will meet my old schoolmates on this Saturday. Do wear suits and we
will go to Four Seasons this time.'

'I don't want to go there to see your friends saying that they have
brought expensive handbags and saying that their boyfriends are so smart and
rich. They make me feel disgusting.'

'Do you mean that I need to go there alone? Others may think that I
have broken up with you. Everyone brings their boyfriends and girlfriends
there.'

'Then you should not go there.'
'Can you take care of my feeling?'
'How about me?'
'I ask you again, do you go with me on Saturday?' She says angrily.
'That's the last word from me. I won't go'

Our project was beginning to work on. We arranged our discussion at
Mongkok. When I started to take a bus to go there, I found that I am already
late. Damn it. My cell phone is out of power and I cannot make a call to her. I
didn't know she was left or not and I just ran to the place we were expected to
meet. She was not here. Where is she? The exit of the MTR station,
discharging with endless of people, presented the appearance of a volcano,
with crowds spilling out of it, constantly disgorging a stream of heads. Shouts, laughter and the shuffling of thousands of feet blended to produce a mighty uproar. The leaflet deliverer, beggars, promoters and I, jutting out like rocks in the river, split the lava into branches, looking at thousands of mouth and eyes. Suddenly, a hand smack on my back. It is Chloe. She heels her head, said, ‘hi’ with a rising tone, ‘where should we go?’ I feel very embarrassed as I was late for an hour. I asked her, in a very low voice, feeling sorry, ‘Where have you been?’

I kept walking around and around the street and I am afraid that you would go away.’

I didn’t know how to react.

We actually did not talk much about the project; instead, we had a long chat. We had a very full dinner at a restaurant that she suggested at Times Square. We left and took a bullet lift to the ground. The lift was moving downwards while the scenery seemed like staying upwards. The light bulbs tied on the trees shimmered. Taxis were waiting for the high heels lady with full-loaded paper bags. Sign boards with bright lights shining on the street. She turned to me, raised her body and kissed me in a second. I looked, in her eyes, fixed, captured by the miracle expression of them. The effect of it on me was thrilling —like a beam of electric— arousing me a vigorous stinging sense of guilty and desire — to do what I wanted to and not to be allowed to. Agonizingly, I was destined not to get anything from her — even a glance. Her lip is just like the blossom of flower after the shower of rain. I was shocked, frozen and captivated.

I had a will to close my eyes and shut her out. My heart was in deep paralysed, the infinite aspiration of her fixed, deep and black eyes filled it in. Dong! ‘She left the lift with the fading out of the mechanical dong sound. Oh! I hadn’t experienced the fantasy, ecstasy and the passion from an image of a girl before. No one had ever desired me or let me think that she was much more beautiful than anybody else in the world, more important than the whole world. I had never depressed or excited as a result of having or wanting her. But now she gave all these feelings to me. Did I love her?
It was the day of the final of the college's basketball match. During the break, Isabella and her cheering team went into the stadium orderly. Isabella's dress and her face stroke the whole stadium; it was too easy for me to recognize her in that crowd as to found a rose among nettles. Everything was lit up by her. She was the smile that can brighten everything around. Beautiful she was, my feelings towards her had changed. The cheering performance started. Isabella and the girls were preparing to wave their hands and legs with the music. The music started and Isabella could not follow the beat! She was nervous, trying to get into it. After the show, I got to her. Feeling ashamed and frightened, her whole face distorted with anger with twitching breathes. ‘Are you feeling better?’ She made a big row to me and murmured.

‘You don’t know anything about me, you don’t know what I want!’ she yelled.

‘I think you need to calm down first’

‘I don’t care about me. Maybe we should not be together.’

‘I don’t know what you mean.’

Every word she uttered was a dagger in my heart. I squeezed my nose and left the stadium. I sat on the embankment and watched the fishing boat moving in and out the harbour till night.

I walked up the steep road back to the hostel. Looking above, I saw there is light in Chloe's room. I didn't know why, got to her flat directly and knocked on her door.

‘Would you like to go out and have a drink?’ Covering my forehead by using my hand, my elbow bent and tilted on the door flame.

‘I know what happened just now... My roommate is not here, come on in!’

Her hair was wet and the white T-shirt she was wearing expressed the best admiration to her brilliant skin colour. She was refreshing.

We chatted, listened to music and we...

I sought on her eyes, her face and onto her body. Her face turned pink and casted down her eyes. I hold her cheek passionately, trying to kiss her and going to kiss her all over her face. My hand slipped to her waist and I hug her tightly; her breath was coming full in my face. The aroma spreading from her hair dissolved me. Her beautiful face, her lovely arms, her smooth and
lymphatic body rose a huge warm pole of desire in my body. Spreading open, her fingers pushed me away. I had no intention to let her go, I stuck my body to hers, listening to her soft moan. Without heeding, she put up her hand to clasp my neck. I kept kissing her until her body grew warm and soft. The feeling was demanding and insistent. Her eyes were wide and wet, flashing, looked at me desperately. The only response that I gave her was my frantic caresses: I let my hand slip from her shoulder to her breasts. I kissed her again, hard and long. I didn’t recognize what I was doing. At that moment, I had fallen, lay and spent.

I was lost.
The phenomenon of \textit{déjà vu} is normal in everyone but occurs more frequently or continuously in certain emotional and organic disorders, results from some unconscious emotional connection with the present experience.
The Love Letters in Staves

Wu Shujin Amanda 伍姝瑾

I The Midnight Song
It must be your fingers again,
Playing gently,
Deep into the night, the sorrow of love
Suffused with blushes
I listen in silence
Sense the strings
Tremulous and tender

A flash of thrill hit through my mind
Your dismal melody
I understand, but how can I echo?

II A Soft Dream
Remember?
That momentary flush
That midnight song
That confession hidden in the drawing on the blackboard
That unexpected first kiss
Those New-year fireworks
Now all melt into a soft dream
Sitting on where we used to swing
When I thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing

III That Night
That night
My boat was blown to river’s heart
While clear sky floated with stars
That night
You took my hand
While my heart almost burst with ecstasy
That night
At the top floor of clochard
The moist and sweet memory
Like honey
That night
Someone drew a bow
In the embrace of moonlight

IV When You are Away
I miss you
Remember when land was enveloped in night curtain
Strolling in starlight with you
Remember when the street lamp shone on the leaves
The dancing shadow we walked through
Now I'm spending the night all alone
Without you
It is too long a day
Even the night
Is gonna bear my breath away!
I was in the dream
Where dimness
Is the gleam
Dreams

Chan Pak Kan, Kenny

Part I - Chu

I have a lot of dreams. I'm not sure whether they are nightmares. Yet, what make them bad dreams are that they are all the same, exactly the same. It happens again and again. The same story, same people, and same place loop every night. It has been almost two weeks. I woke up in a sweat in the midnight.

In the dream, there is a well with a vortex inside. People stand in front of it and yell out what they want to be and jump into the vortex. And then there are other apparently unrelated dreams followed.

I meet a girl, she stand on a road junction, and she looks confused and miserable, I am not brave enough to talk to her. And then I walk to the shore, and I saw a captain alone on his ship on a rough sea; when I try to help him, I am drowned, and I awoke.

I do not really believe in 'the god', but sometimes things happen regularly and maybe it tries to tell you something, in a symbolic way. Perhaps, it is sort of defense mechanism or psychological stuff? However, what does it attempt to tell me? Anyway, I can't really sleep well and focus on my job. It all happened three months ago when I started working at the laundry shop.

My name was Chu. I would be nineteen this summer. I had no qualification, no working experience. I was introverted and shy. All in all, I was a loser. I need a job. The laundry downstairs was recruiting a helper; I decided to take a try.

'Laundry, Sir?'

'Oh... no, well, I see the employment notice out there.'

A middle-aged man, look me up and down, 'work from eight to nine, one meal, quite a hard job, don't waste my time if you can't manage that, any problems?'

'Umm... no problem I guess.'

'Good then, see you tomorrow!'

149
He was the owner of the laundry shop. He was called Will, my boss. I knew him well these three months, a harsh and tough man; he washed clothes for his whole life. For him, laundry only means money.

8am in the morning, it was the busiest time in a day; people took their clothes here before they went to work. She was one of the customers and her name was Faye.

I notice her face, she must be someone I knew, and her face was so familiar, perhaps in dream?

Six pounds, that will be twenty-seven dollars. Are you... are you? I asked.

‘Are you new? Don’t you stare at me like this, I’ve never met you.’

I cast down my eyes and wrote her a receipt, Do you believe in transmigration?’

She was surprised by me but she had no response. I didn’t know why I would say such words. Perhaps, I had recently watched those tv-programmes about some super nature stuff. And I did not believe I dared to chat up a girl. Although she didn’t seem to dislike it, I was not sure I would talk to her again.

She took the receipt and went away.

The work in the laundry was to deal with the customers; clothing, I washed, dried and ironed the clothes repeatedly, repeatedly.

‘It’s good for you, young man.’ Will interrupted in a sudden.

‘What?’ I asked, ironing the clothes at the same time.

‘It’s good for you, the laundry.’

Sure, but why?’

‘You learn. You learn many things from it. You know, ironing, washing, and a lot of skills. Well, and the important thing is, you learn how to hide your emotion. Everyday, you are dealing with these, stinky, smelly, ugly dress, underwear, socks. They are the closest things to the customers, you are dealing with people privacy, but you can’t show how you feel when you return these things to them. It’s philosophical.’

‘You really love working here.’ I said.

No, I hated this laundry, but this was my father’s business. I didn’t want to disappoint him, though he has died for a long time, and I am too old to change now. I was so fond of the water, the salty water and the strong...
breeze, but not this damn stinky chemical water. I used to dream that I was a
captain and I sailed on a beautiful sea alone. ‘

Oh, was that a rough sea?’
‘No, but why are you asking?’
‘Nothing.’
I answered nothing, but the fact was that I once got a similar dream a
ship captain died in the rough sea. It probably meant nothing and is naïve to
say that.

In the next day, Faye came and took her clothes back.
‘What do you mean?’ she suddenly asked.
‘Sorry, what?’
‘The first time we met, the transmigration, you remember?’
‘Oh, yes, transmigration. It is just like the clothes in the washing
machine, it was spun one point to another point, again and again.’ I put my
point forward.

So, if we start our lives again and again, what is the point of it then?’
‘Umm…. I don’t know. People said that doing good things will be
rewarded in the next life. So, what we should do now is to behave well,
perhaps…’

‘But Lives start over, you know. It doesn’t matter you feel good or bad.
It means nothing after all, can’t even remember them. Anyway, I have to go
now. Maybe we can chat later.’

Sure.’ I answered.

In that night, I started to dream. The Ship, Faye, Will, the ocean. I was
drowned and awaked. It was 4 am in the morning.

‘Hey Chu, focus on your job, or else you don’t need to come back
tomorrow!’ Will scolded me with a discontented face.

‘I’m sorry. I didn’t sleep well yesterday. I kept dreaming yesterday
night….and… I said.

Will stopped me and said ‘Child. People like us have to accept our fate.
We are the working class. Just Put your head down and work! No excuse.’

‘Yes boss. But I just wonder, maybe we could choose our fate before
our birth. I just have some weird dreams last night. People were yelling out
what they want to be and things like that.’
Stop making me laugh, child. If this is it, there will be no poor people and I would choose to be a rich man.' He laughed, but paused and hesitated at the same time.

Then he seemed to whisper to himself, 'Why do you think I work here for the whole life then? Why?'

I made no response and I don't know what to answer too. Perhaps, he is right. I should just accept my fate. Transmigration is just bullshit.

Time flew. One week go after another. One night, I dreamed again. A ship was sailing right into a giant whirlpool. The Captain, which has gone through thousand of storms on the sea, showed no fear to it. The Captain lighted his last cigar, steering his ship to avoid the vortex. Nonetheless, the giant whirlpool sunk the ship down and tore it apart. The Captain, in his last breath, swore to defeat the water, controlling them in his next life.

Part II – Faye

My name is Faye. I know a male recently. His name is Chu, a laundry assistant. I knew him three months ago at the laundry shop. He is a nice guy, perhaps, but he didn't know my nature - I don't love males. I just hate them, hate them!

Yet, he is quite an interesting male I discovered. He has a strange thought that we can choose our fate before our birth. This is not a laundry worker would usually say I presume. He dated me out a few weeks ago, which surprisingly I didn't decline, telling me all these silly stuff.

He looked real pale and there were dark circles under his eyes. He said he got bad dreams these days again and again. He said he dreamed a girl and that was certainly me, though the girl has a different face.

He grabbed my shoulders tightly and burst into tears, said, 'I'm sorry. I'm so sorry about it. I know why I am here now finally and what I should do now. I hurt you so much! I hope you can forgive me! Please... please... please!' He kneeled on the floor begging me with broken voice.

'You're insane! Ok, ok! I forgive you. For God sake! Please get up! People are staring at us. What's the matter with you?'}
I don’t really know what he was talking about. I don’t even know him. How come he could possibly hurt me? I should have denied the date. Crazy males! Something must have driven him mad.

That night, after work, I slept with Candy, my girlfriend and I dreamed. It is a vague but vivid one. I was chased by a man. He tried to kill me. Yet, I didn’t try to escape. I sat down and cried. A man was rushing towards me. His face was fuzzy. I couldn’t see it clearly but I wasn’t sure that his seemed look like Chu. Perhaps I had thought too much that day. I awoke with a broken heart. I swore to myself I would never touch a man. I couldn’t distinguish it is a dream or a reality.

Some days later, I as usual take my dirty clothes to the laundry. I do not see Chu working there. There is a new recruiting poster sticking on the wall. The shop owner said he has quitted the job.

Where is he now? He is such a strange man, but there is a strange feeling that I feel relieved when I see him every times.

Part III - News

A piece of News is broadcasting on the TV.

‘A man, a former employer of the laundry shop, commits suicide in the washing machine.........detector do not think it is a murder.........’

He finally pressed the button, letting the vortex swallow him. Perhaps he has really found out the purpose of his life or he has tried to select his fate again.

Will, the laundry shop owner, has sold his shop and used the money to buy a little ship. He sails again.

Faye has tried to control her feeling towards man, she still loves her nature though, but her grievances are gone.

Dreams... strange dreams...

Have you ever a dream walking in a familiar world, a familiar feeling? Maybe it tells you your past and why you are here.
Love, don’t expire!

Wong Yee Tung, Harries

Response to One Flesh, by Elizabeth Jennings and John Donne’s Good Morrow

I am Mina, an ordinary girl with something weird and confusing that I would like to confide. This ‘something’ is probably the harshest fact I have ever come across in my fifteen-year journey through life.

As I have said, I am just an ordinary girl who can’t have enough fairy tales from parents. When I was small, I enjoyed Daddy’s actions as well as Mammy’s vivid descriptions to visualize what is going on in the stories. Fascinated by the ‘happily ever after’ love in the fairy tales, I started reading novels and listening to songs about love; not only love for family and friends, but also complicated love affairs.

I just could not stop fantasizing about love though I had no ways to learn what it is. As from what I had read, I literally did get the picture in my mind. Perhaps all of us are born to love and do not ‘awaken’ until we meet our true love. We are childish, naïve and unconscious before meeting our beloved ones as we are more aware of ourselves by then. We only truly live when we found our love in which the union between the ‘awakened’ souls creates a self-sufficient ‘world’ of reality of their own, rejecting the outside world and their past. Additionally, the two lovers are like the two hemispheres, completing each another to form one world. They are then no longer two separate individuals but one flesh. And the passion between lovers never dies where the perfect love and even the lovers achieve immortality.

Why didn’t my parents tell me about their romance? Whenever I wanted to have bedtime stories about love, they refused by saying, ‘You are still too young for that, Mina.’ They ran back into their room afterwards. Out of curiosity, I waited at the door to see if I could hear their conversation. Silence. I had waited for that single promising noise but still, all I had for answer was, silence.

‘Maybe they are just whispering on the bed as they are close to each other?’ thought I. ‘I don’t think they are sleeping though since the lights are still on.’ Or they are basically satisfied when there’s just physical contact, so
they simply don’t need anything verbal? ’I had so many doubts to be dispelled yet. I was very inquisitive about what was going on inside so that I peeped through the keyhole.

I was astonished at the scene behind the door for it was far from my expectation.

My parents were lying apart on their own separate beds instead of sharing a bed. I did not know one kind-sized bed in daytime could be transformed into two single beds. No wonder I could not hear a noise behind the door: Daddy was holding a book, though not reading it and Mammy was on her bed, day-dreaming about childhood perhaps, and looking at the shadows overhead. Although it seemed that there was no connection and communication between them, I could tell, they were waiting, waiting for something new in between them.

How cool they lie, so still and calm that probably they hardly ever touch.’ I uttered these words unconsciously. I do not use 'cool' as something cool but my heart eager for the idea of love was abruptly cooled down. I expected the passion between their passions were the flotsam tossed up from a storm. Strangely, they are apart yet close together, and silent, the way they be with each other, is the cord of their love.

Since time flies like a feather leaving no marks, I wonder if my parents knew they had grown old. Love is, no doubt, immortal, but I wonder if they realized their love and passion which brought me here had grown cold. I wonder if there is an expiry date for passion that once it expires, what is left in the relationship is just silence and ‘cooled-down’ affections.

They were two halves made into one for their unswerving love, as time goes by are they still one flesh as they once were?
Maomao

Maomao was a dog. His fur was golden and brown with funny spots around his nose. His eyes, which were big and round, often filled with curiosity. He liked cats. Once he saw cats, he approached them and stared at them excitedly. Sometimes he received responses of showing teeth and claws because not every cat was able to understand his enthusiasm. But such frustration could not stop him from chasing cats.

He had a small bell tied on his neck. When he walked and ran, the bell rang along with his paces. The tinkles were a beautiful melody which ran through my whole childhood. At about six o'clock every afternoon, the bell appeared from the most inside building of our residence community and skipped toward the gate which located beside the building I lived. Every time I heard the bell, I knew it was time for Maomao to go for a walk. The tinkles were light and clear, showing his joyful and excited footstep. I liked to look through my window and watch the happy dog whose body was gilded by the setting sun.

He usually went for a walk with the professor's daughter. In the days when he was in a good mood, he rushed straight ahead so that the lady couldn't catch up with him. When she shouted 'Maomao, slow down', he would rush faster and turned his head to observe her face. If there was no irritation, he kept on rushing. Once she showed any anger, he would run back to her side and made some small sounds as if he was asking forgiveness for his naughty behavior. His lovely look made me smile from the bottom of my heart. If I met him in the yard, I stroked his head gently. In return, he licked my hand. The warm and soft tongue always cheered me up, as if it had the magic power of sunshine. In my low-spirited days, I looked forward to seeing his lively appearance so that I could refresh myself.

After I entered middle school, I lived in the dormitory and came home only at weekends. The increasing study burden and many other things distracted my attention. As a result, the bell faded in my mind. One Saturday
night, when I was having dinner with my parents, the familiar bell came to my ear. I listened, and found something strange. The bell, which was in an intermittent tempo, wasn't as energetic as before. I saw through the window and found that Maomao walked towards the gate in low and unsteady steps. His liveliness disappeared.

Does Maomao get sick? I asked in surprise.

There is nothing serious. He is just...getting old, my mother answered, 'He is a little older than you, remember? You're fourteen now. In dogs' world, a fourteen-year-old dog is like a grey-haired old man.'

Why didn't I notice his ageing before?'

Well, in fact, if you get along with somebody everyday, you are not able to tell his difference although he does get old, my father explained.

I was too astonished to ask more. A mixed emotion rose in my mind. In some ways, Maomao was like my good friend. We came to the world at about the same time. We grew up in the same place. However, when I stood in the starting point of my life and faced a bright future, he approached the finishing line. Seeing his weak appearance, I found it hard to connect it with the energetic Maomao he used to be. Day by day, season by season, year by year, he passed my window. I had taken it for granted and never thought of his departure. Suddenly, I realized that he would leave the world someday. That was the first time I went so close to the sorrowful word, death.

Time passed by. His eyesight became poor as well. Going for a walk gradually turned into a difficult job for him, but he never missed a day. With slow and unsteady footsteps, he chased cats, searched corners curiously, expressed friendship to everyone, as he did everyday before. Sometimes he bumped into the walls because he couldn't tell the distance, but he just shook his head and went on rushing. The bell rang along with his paces, playing a beautiful melody. When I stroked him, he raised his head and barked softly. I saw the setting sun in his spiritless eyes. Tears blurred my vision.

One day, the bell didn't appear in the usual time. I waited until the darkness fell. Gloom lingered in my mind. The next day, my father told me, Maomao had passed away. The soft tongue, the excited appearance, the clear bell had left, forever.
I thought of him even after he had passed away for such a long time. When the sunshine passed thorough the window at dusk, the clear bell appeared in my heart, as if Maomao was still by my side. He was the first creature to show me the whole journey of life. I saw his infancy, youth, maturity, agedness. At last, death, which comes like a heavy flood, took him away. And I even can not feel the approach of death. His leaving reminds me of the fact that no one will accompany me forever. What’s more, the departure may come before I am well prepared. It is cruel, but it is the truth of life.

Thanks, Maomao. May your soul rest in peace.
The Boy Who Haunts My Dreams

Is it a sort of beautiful coincidence?
Or my own imagination?
To dream of you night by night
Day by day.
My restrained heart begins to sink
When I see the ethereal smile on your
taintless face.
Surrounded by the mist,
behind those deep hazel eyes,
I got lost
in your sweet and soft tenderness.
searching for you for years,
I found nothing
as you vanished without a trace.
but your fragile scent seems to still exist in the thin air.
Haunting.

Luna Chan
A Brief History of the Declaration of
Independence

Cindy Qi 漆晓宇

October 21st, A.D. 2004, 21:30p.m.
The atmosphere of war was imminent. The night was quite as dead. Only occasionally, a patrol’s clop broke the silence. I pecked outside. There wasn’t a living creature in sight. Thick and dark cloud covered the moon. Dim orange light from the streetlamps was powerless to penetrate the darkness. Bold trees silhouetted their ghostlike shadows on the drawn curtain of my bedroom.

Another tread was approaching. I closed my eyes and pretended to be sleeping. As footsteps got closer, the sound became louder and heavier, like a hammer striking on my heart.

It stopped. Paused for a moment, and then turned away. Steps echoed along with my pounding heart. A few seconds later, silence dominated the room again.

I knew it was a patrol—the eye of the Queen—checking if anyone wasn’t sleeping.

I sat up and shook everyone up from pretended sleeps. He's gone,’ I said.

I’ve been plotting the revolt with my fellow comrades for a long time. Freedom, Privacy, Pride, and Puberty all urged me to fire the first shot.

‘I’ve had enough of The Queen's autocracy,’ gnashed Freedom, ‘Checking whether we are sleeping, limiting our leisure, forcing us to work.’

She has violated me several times,’ shivered Privacy. She questioned my whereabouts every day. She made me report whom I spend time with, in the name of care! I can’t lead a life like that anymore!’

‘I know what you’ve been through,’ I said, ‘I’m just... just waiting for a right time.’

‘Alas! There will never be a right time!’ yelled Puberty, ‘it’s going to happen tomorrow! We want liberation! We want INDEPENDENCE!’
Shhhhhhhhhhh, I hissed, 'keep you voice down! We'll see what happens tomorrow, OK?'

October 22nd, A.D. 2004, 6:30a.m.

In the dining room, in sailed the Queen, arrogantly as ever. We settled down around the breakfast table. She sensed the tension in the air. It made her thought of the unpleasant negotiation the other day, when I and my fellows had an unpleasant conversation with her. But she seemed to ignore it as usual. She never admitted that her people were unsatisfied with her.

She established the kingdom; she ran this country; she raised the people on her land. Why would those foolish, ungrateful citizens oppose her? They are just being immature and whiny. I was sure these were what has been going through her mind.

She frowned and took a glimpse of us. Then, she began her routine morning preaching.

She just regards us as idiots, doesn't she?' said Prick significantly. I knew he was provoking me.

I felt restless. My fellows kept eyeing me. I looked at Freedom, Privacy, Pride and Puberty. They were my fellows, my comrades, my friends. Past misery flooded my mind. I saw Freedom’s fingers being chopped off. I saw Privacy being slapped and Pride being slashed. Puberty turned his face to me, begging, 'You can't let the Queen manipulates us like this.'

I couldn't hear a word the Queen was saying. I watched her lips moving as if in slow motion. Her voice turned into some annoying buzzing to me. A wolf in my heart was snarling, scratching, struggling.

Puberty hastened me, 'We must revolt. We'll carve our Declaration of Independence on the stone.'

I started up and shouted, 'Fire!!'

October 22nd, A.D. 2004, 7:20a.m.

I carved the Declaration of Independence on a stone. I threw the chisel, stepped on a hill and, with a strong sense of victory, gazed at the land I just conquered. I was the winner of a bloody battle. I defeated the tyrant. I led my fellows to a new era of liberation and independence.

I looked around.
I was astonished.

I was standing on a ruined land. After the fierce gun fights and cannon bombings, nothing was left. Everything was burned. The houses, the trees, the rocks, the earth...and the corpses, all burned black. The sky was covered by the cloud of gunpowder. The air stung with burning smell. There were no more colors in the world. Even the blood was burned black.

I looked for my comrades. I only found their dead bodies.

Freedom... Privacy... Pride. When I reached Puberty, he still lingered one gasp. I held his hands in my shivering ones. Puberty slowly opened his eyes. He moved his lips and spoke, in such a low voice that I had to press my ear on his mouth.

'Look... at... what we've... done,' he said, weekly, softly. 'We are... childish...'

A burst of chilliness struck me. I felt so lonely and isolated. Nothing left after the war. My enemy, my comrades, all fell in battle.

Suddenly, I realized that the Queen I killed in war was not just the Queen of the kingdom. She's the Queen of my home, the Queen of my family. She's the Queen who gave me my life.

The stone carved with the Declaration of Independence cracked into pieces.
jamais vu

(/ʒɑːˈmeɪ ku/) from the French, meaning "never seen")

is used to describe any familiar situation which is not
recognized by the observer
I just call to say I love you

Junnie Zhang 张浩君

It was nearly the end of the summer holiday. Almost two months had passed. I stayed at home, waiting for a person to come, but in vain. He didn't turn up.

Disappointed, I picked up the phone and dialed the familiar number, reluctantly.

Dad, the new semester is around the corner. I need money for my tuition. Would you come and bring the money?' I said on the phone, feeling awkward, as if I was asking, or begging for money from some stranger. I never thought a daughter should call her dad for money. I didn't remember how many times I'd felt like this. But I knew every time I had to call him for money, I could not feel more hesitant and embarrassed. And I hated these moments from the bottom of my heart.

My heart was pounding, expected a reply that could comfort me, in the hope that he could show his care for me.

I am too busy to bring you the money in person. Would you just come to my place so I can give it to you?' replied my dad on the line, careless.

On hearing this, I felt like I was sinking in the cold lake, and the bitter cold penetrated my body. I quivered inside. We hadn't seen each other for a whole semester. How could he be so busy that he could not even spare half an hour or just a few minutes to visit me, his daughter?

His place? Yes, his place! His new family with someone else. I'd known this for almost ten years since I was at primary school. I should have got used to it, to a shared father. I tried to accept it, but, failed.

Even to this day I still remember the days when I was the apple of dad's eye. Being his beloved daughter, I was the princess of the family. He would lift me into the air with me sitting in his warm and broad palm when I was a tiny little kid. And then I would burst into laughter as if it was the world's funniest game to play. This was our daily entertainment. He would take me in the back seat of his shabby bike, and would ride me simply for joy to wherever I liked to be. Then I would lean on his back comfortably and soon
fall asleep with the tender wind rustling around me. He would buy me beautiful
dolls when I became a little girl, for which mum would scold him as wasting
money. But he would maintain his unwritten rule that girlhood without dolls
was incomplete.

Those days are gone, packed in my heart. Only when I was alone, only
when I saw other child with his/her dad, would I recall these memories, in sad
happiness.

'Do you ever care about me? Would you just spare some time for me,
being a father? Don't let me take you as an ATM!' I hung up the phone, tears
rolling down my cheek. I didn't see where I got my guts to say such
disrespectful words. But they were hidden deep inside my heart. It was a
wound in my heart. And my dad just ripped the bandage off it, landed me in
pain.

I remember the scene that mum cried sadly in the corner and dad
smoked indifferently in the chair. I was so young that I thought dad and mum
quarreled just like I quarreled with my peer over toys. But the seem-to-be-
lastling quarrels broke the peace of the family; irritation stifled the love between
dad and mum. Time went by, however, quarrels never ended. I was too young
to understand mum's word 'betrayal'. I know this was a bad word that made
my mum so sad. But I didn't realize this would someday affect my dad's love
for his daughter. I found dad didn't come back home for dinner at times; then
he didn't come back home at night any more; finally he didn't come back home
at all. And until then I knew he was leaving, leaving me for somewhere I didn't
belong. He knew I loved him and that I didn't want him to go. He knew it. He
knew it. But he just left, without an explanation.

I was no longer the princess of the family because there was no longer
an emperor in the family. No more lifting games, no more joyful rides, no
more dolls......but endless loneliness and desire for a father, for a close father,
not a distant one, who came to visit you as a routine, who gave you money
when you pay tuition, who lived with other people that were strangers to you.

I never uttered these feeling to him until the phone call. I exploded. I
could not imagine how dad would react. Would he be furious about my
disrespectful words? Would he just pay no attention to them? Or would he
come to embrace me, his lonely daughter, who was waiting for her father to come back?

But no matter what he did, I would take myself as the victim. He made the mistake; he made the wrong decision to leave; he left me lonely. I could not forgive him. Oh, I just shouldn’t forgive him.

But when he finally came to see me and brought the money, I knew I never hated him. I was afraid of looking into his eyes, because once I did, I would burst into tears myself. I longed for the love in his eyes. But I was afraid I could not find it.

He didn’t say anything. We had been this distant for such a long time since he was considered no longer a member of the family. He knew I was avoiding his eyes. He put down the money and left.

Summer holiday ended. I came back to school after an eight-hour bus trip, tired, but still remembered to call home to announce my safe arrival to my mum. Usually I would phone my dad as well. But this time, I did not.

But the phone rang with dad’s number on the screen. I picked up the phone, heard dad’s voice on the line.

‘Have you arrived school safely?’ said my dad, calm and peaceful.

‘Yes.’

‘Take care of yourself.’

Trying my best to hold back my tears, I said ‘I will. The same to you.’
Beyond Love

Sadhwani Jagarthi Haresh, Charmene

One glance shall make me live on forever,
Far, yet protecting me from life's terror.
Where people keep us away for their fears,
That love will conquer the world in few years.

Who says distance makes the heart grow fonder,
For love can't exceed this – why still ponder.
Love is eternal with our merged souls,
That fills the naked oceans in all poles.

My love’s heart is purer than the purest,
Beating with rhythm my heart at its best.
Unspoken words were sent through those deep eyes,
And drowning in them, I started to rise.

The immortal desire makes blood flow,
Calling for cupid to commence its show.
Lost in the Night

I dashed up the stairs of the dormitory, disturbing its slumber with the clear clicking of my high heels. I passed by some early risers whose eyes I dared not meet and made it to the top floor.

I stood in front of my room, took out the key and held it for a moment while I gazed at the glistening reflection on the door made by the sequins on my dress - well, Jean’s dress, actually. My whole outfit was borrowed - the dress from Jean, the coat from Junnie, the panty hose from Cindy and the high heels from Hannah.

I sneaked into the room and met myself in the full-length mirror on the cabinet at the entrance. I looked weary and haggard in the shiny and glossy borrowed outfit. I had wondered when I woke up at the school hostel this morning: why haven’t they melted away?

I took off the borrowed outfit, the disguise I used last night, and took a shower. Then I brushed my teeth, trying really hard to get rid of the smell in my mouth. I really shouldn’t have had chocolate before bed without brushing my teeth. Then I stood in front of the mirror, relieved to see myself in my usual outfit. Karen, my roommate, was up, dressing. I wondered if I had woken her up. So, how was last night? ‘She asked.

‘How was last night?’ I wondered to myself. Well, whatever it was, it was certainly not what I had expected.

Last night, I went to Zhuhai Bar Street with Cindy, Junnie and Vanderbilt. We figured it must be really exciting to explore this mysterious world. In order to blend in, Cindy helped me borrow my outfit for the night.

On our way to the Bar Street, I was constantly aware of the extra attention my borrowed outfit drew. Cindy and Junnie said people stared because I looked ‘hot’. But I doubted that. I thought maybe they were wondering ‘why the pub look’ or ‘why would a schoolgirl dress like that’. And when I asked a middle-aged couple for directions, the woman looked me up and down with skeptical eyes and said harshly: ‘Bar Street? You don’t know the
way? Luckily the man told me the direction with a kind smile. I thanked him and hurried back to my little exploration team.

Our eyes lit up when we saw pretty red lightbulbs on both side of the street. On the right side of the Bar street was a row of bars beautifully lit. With light steps and a lively spirit, we scanned through the bars as we walked down the street, trying to get the whole picture of the Bar Street. When we got to the last bar, we decided to go inside for a closer look.

The bar was Halloween-themed.

We could either walk right into it or choose a longer passage—a haunted hut. Vanderbilt and I chose the latter.

As soon as we entered the hut, we were overwhelmed by heavy smoke and a pungent smell. We couldn’t find our way in the thick smoke at first and were pushed back and forth by others who were scared and anxious like us. When we managed to get past the smoky area, ‘ghosts’ began to pop out. Though I tried to comfort myself that they were only people who dressed like ghosts, I still got really frightened when they appeared all of a sudden, reaching their hands out to grab me—-one of them even hugged me from my back! Finally we made it through the long and horrifying passage to the bar, joining Cindy and Junnie.

The bar was exquisitely decorated to bring out the terrifying and yet enchanting atmosphere. The wooden-carved furniture looked old and classy with fake cobwebs on them. Waiters and waitresses had Halloween make-up, looking cold and wicked. On a small round stage, a young singer in a red tank-top and hot-pants was performing. She had a beautiful voice. But it couldn’t pierce through the noise in the bar—people all seemed to be shouting and laughing at the top of their voice. We walked around the bar and decided we should look for a quieter bar—we simply couldn’t stand the noise any longer.

We left the Halloween-themed bar and walked into the next one. It was so much quieter. It was comparatively small and had fewer customers. A singer in striped shirt was singing a sweet and sad love song.

The mood attracted us. We sat down and ordered a bottle of beer. We drank the beer while we listened to the song. I looked around and saw people rolling dice, drinking and chatting—except for one man who sat alone, with beer and cigarettes on his table, staring blankly into the air in front of him. I
felt we were in a foreign land where everybody knew exactly why he or she were there and what they were supposed to do, everybody but us — even the man who sat alone seemed content with staring into nothing. I suddenly realized: we had no business being there. Just then the singer announced the performance was over and left. Then some rough dance music took over the bar.

‘Let’s go,’ I said, after finishing my drink.

We left and traipsed from one bar to another, desperately hoping to make something out of the trip. But we didn’t make any new discoveries. The bars looked very alike to us — noisy and crowded.

‘This was supposed to be exciting.’

‘We were supposed to have fun.’

‘We’ve gotta do something!’

And so we decided we should forget about the disappointing Bar Street ‘adventure’ and take a taxi to the nearest karaoke box. We were going to sing and shout and have fun!

We did get to the nearest karaoke. But we never got in. The large billboard outside the karaoke box stating its charging standard warned us off like a grim and hostile ‘NO ENTRY’ sign.

We turned away from the unfriendly warning sign and walked along the road. We brainstormed for somewhere to go but nothing came to mind. And we didn’t really know exactly where we were. So we just kept alking down the endless street that stretched into the night. Junnic began to hum, and then she sang, louder and louder. The rest of us sang along and hummed when we forgot the lyrics. I couldn’t recall when the last time I sang so freely. Since when did we have to be in a box to sing? Since when did we have to have accompaniments to sing?

Singing lifted our spirits but silence followed and the night turned stifling again. We decided to grab something to eat at McDonalds and then go back to school.

I sat in McDonald, drinking my hot chocolate, and saw myself in windowpane. The black dress with shiny sequins made me look more mature. I felt like a child who dressed up like an adult.
‘Give me those, Max!’ I saw a young man said with slight irritation to his friend who held the food. Max held the food high above his head and said, ‘Come get them!’ The other tried to snatch the food and Max tiptoed to lift them even higher.

‘Americans!’ I said, shaking my head with a big smile to Cindy.

‘You know what else is funny?’ she said.

‘What?’

‘That we try so hard to blend into the adult world and they are so comfortable acting like kids in McDonald.’

I contemplated and smiled.

I finished drinking my hot chocolate and said. Shall we go back now?’

‘Yeah, let’s go.’
It was a deadly quiet, extremely warm and incredibly stuffy Saturday night in 2005. Staying in the hostel room, I was alone and six hundred km away from home. My roommate and floor mates who were locals went home during the weekends. The room was spacious and fully equipped with everything a college student needed. I was lying on my bed, staring at the pale-yellow-painted ceiling. It was so quiet that I heard only the ticking of the clock. I had been lying for almost an hour, hoping that I would fall asleep. I didn't, of course. So, I woke up and sat by the window instead. Glancing at the clock on the top of the wooden bookshelf, it said 1 a.m.

Under the bookshelf, it was my study desk which leaned against the wall. There were a few textbooks and some stationery scattered around on the desk. At the hidden corner of the wall, there were photos. They were there for such a long time; I had not looked at them for months. With the help of the dim street lamplight that came in from the window, I tried to look at them. There were photos of my family, friends and boyfriend. I smiled when I looked at the funny faces that I made in those photos. I had so much fun taking part in activities and hanging out with friends. My smile froze when I saw the picture of Wendy.

As I was neither a mummy nor daddy's girl, she was my best friend, the one whom I shared everything with. She was the first one I would think of, whenever I was happy or down. We would call each other at least once a day, even if we were together for the whole day at school. We went to the same kindergarten, the same primary and the same high school. In fact, we attended the same college, too. Everyone around us said we look alike and that we were like sisters. Whenever there was Wendy, there was me. We were like sisters, indeed, until five months ago.

I left home, when I was seventeen. After Form Five, I worked as a waitress cum receptionist at a resort in Redang Island, one of the most famous
islands in Malaysia. Redang Island became even more famous after a Hong Kong movie was filmed there. The film was starred by Sammi Cheng and Richie Ren, the two Hong Kong famous superstars. I worked there for around ten months and I had not been home, not even once. It was the first time in my life, I left home for such a long period.

I was brought up in a strict family. My younger sister and I were not allowed to be rude or cheeky. Mother trained us to be independent since we were toddlers. We made our own bed every day since we were three. I washed my own uniform and school shoes since I was seven. We were also responsible for certain house chores since we were in primary school. When we were teenagers, we were not allowed to go out with friends without asking for permissions. Mother said we could only go out when there were birthday parties. Before going out, mother would make sure that she knew every friend that would be at the party. She would also drive us all the way to the places where the parties were held and she would remind us not to be wild. She often picked us up within a few hours.

But this time, I left home without their permission. I had been staying at home, doing nothing for almost five months after sitting for my public examination. I had been begging my mom for months before she finally loosened up. Father did not allow me to leave but I left anyway, without his knowing when he was out of state.

Three months after, Wendy came and joined me in Redang Island, after I persuaded my boss, who is also my friend's dad. It was in the Island, where I met my boyfriend, Hamadi, who was a snorkelling guide back then. He was a medium-height and dark-skinned boy. I have always loved dark-skinned boys. He was sweet; he would help me out whenever he was free. He would also wait for me to finish cleaning every night by using the excuse of watching TV at the bar. He asked me out a few times, but I didn't accept. Until he held my hands when we went snorkelling one day, my heart was beating so fast and I blushed. Since then, I knew I liked him.

In fact, I struggled so hard before I decided to be with him. Madi is a Malay Malaysian, which also made him a Muslim. This might not be worth further consideration if we were in another country, but it was a big deal in Malaysia. If I want to marry him in the future, I have to convert to be a Muslim.
I have to change my name into a Muslim name, too. Besides religion, there are tons of problems that we would have to deal with. Malays are of the lower social class in Malaysia. Racial and cultural differences would also make things complicated for us. However, all these weren’t my main concerns. My family’s consensus will be the biggest issue. They would never approve of us, I was certain about that, and I am still sure about this even today.

While I was struggling within myself with the complications of my relationship, Wendy got along well with another Malay boy. They started to see each other, few weeks after she started her job as a waitress. We went snorkelling with the boys in the evening. Then, they helped us with most of the jobs at the restaurant during dinner time and at night, we would walk along the beach with our boys, chatting while holding hands, like every couple did. Madi celebrated my eighteenth birthday that year. He gave me a Doraemon stuffed-toy and a clock, as gifts. Everything was just so perfect and I prayed it would last. I could only keep him as a secret lover in order to keep my dream beautiful.

My parents found out eventually, a week before I went to college. They were furious. Father shouted at me for almost an hour before he slapped me on my face for three times. He never beat me, not even once since I was born. He must have been very heart-broken. He said I betrayed him and his trust for me. Father is a tall, big man. He was always smiling and joking around with me. That night, he looked dreadfully different; he looked like a creepy tall monster that was going to eat me up because I woke him up from his deep sleep. I did not have enough courage to look into his eyes. I had not seen my father looking like that, never, ever in my life. The moment he slapped me on my face, I did not feel any pain on my face but my heart was bleeding, as if there were somebody stabbing it, again and again with a sharp dagger. I felt guilty, sad, insecure and lonely.

‘You are not going to college and you are grounded from now on.’ Without looking at me again, father took away my mobile phone and the Doraemon that Madi gave me.

Burying my face in my palms, I sobbed.
Someone opened the door of my bedroom, not long after father had left. It was mother. Standing in front of my bed, she stared at me for minutes, she then walked towards me, slapped me on my face, for another three times.

*In my life, I never taught you to be like this. I spent my whole life, wanting you to be the best, given you everything you needed, is this how you repay me? How many times have I told you that your father looked down upon me, for not being a good mother since you and your sister were young? If he could slap you for three times, so could I. I raised you!* mother said before she walked out from my room and banged the door. I felt as if my parents had walked out from my life, not wanting me to be their daughter anymore. They abandoned me.

Hugging my pillow tight, I cried my heart out silently, until dawn. How I wished Madi were there. I resented my parents, for a long period of time, for that night. They didn’t know that I did struggle, I had been crying over this relationship for not being approved, for a thousand times at those sleepless nights. They didn’t try to understand. For a few years since then, I had nightmares; I always dreamt they left the little-girl-me in an old, dark, cold and unwanted building. I ran down the staircases and chased their car, in the dream. I woke up in tears countless times.

After that night, father and mother didn’t talk to me or look at me for days. Three days before school started, I wrote a letter to father, told him that I wanted to go to school. He did not reply. One evening, he wanted me to kneel in front of the Buddha statue and swear that I would never see Madi again. Deep down in my heart, I knew I would keep seeing Madi and I could only see him again if I was away from home. For Madi and the studies’ sake, I swore, in front of Buddha. I then went to college. Father did not give me back my mobile phone. He said he would contact me through Wendy, who would also be my roommate at the hostel. But father did not know that Wendy and I were on the same boat. We promised to back each other up, no matter what horrible things would happen in the future. We even dreamed about a joined wedding reception.

I was happy and excited that I am leaving home. Somehow, I think I was too young to understand my parents’ hearts. I should have empathized them more.
Everything went well until Wendy and her boyfriend broke up two months after we went to college. She was devastated. I woke up in the middle of the night, to give her a hug while she was crying hard and I helped her catching up with her homework. I did all the cleanings while she was sitting on her bed, looking sad. I knew she wasn’t happy whenever my parents or my boyfriend called me through her phone. So, I saved most of my food allowance so that I could buy a new phone. After a few months, I had enough money to buy one on my boyfriend’s birthday. We were eight hundred km apart, on his first birthday with me. I surprised him by calling him with my new phone.

With the new phone, Wendy and I started to have conflicts. She sometimes asked me for my phone and she read all my messages. I wasn’t pleased but I did not refuse, as she was my best friend. We shared everything before I met my boyfriend and I wanted it to remain unchanged. I did not want to lose my friendship with her over my boyfriend.

Mother called one night; she asked if I was still seeing Madi. She said Wendy’s mom went to my house earlier that day and she shouted outside our front door, saying that her daughter dated Malay boys because of me. I felt like someone punched me in my stomach. My mind went blank and I staggered on the chair. For a few minutes, I forgot to breathe, as if the world stopped spinning. My eyes were filled with tears. I couldn’t believe it. My best friend stabbed me in the back, the moment when I needed her supports the most. I did not confront her.

Things got more complicated when Wendy and I had a big row, one night. She blamed me for being noisy talking on phone at nights and I blamed her for not cleaning the room and betraying me. We haven’t talked to each other since then. I moved out from the room a week after that night. I felt angry, upset and disappointed. I then realised how hurtful it is when someone whom you loved and fully-trusted betrayed you. This was how my parents felt that night, I guess. My deep-seated resentment against my parents was gone by then.

BANG!

A sudden loud noise pulled me back from my recollections. It sounded like glass breaking. I turned around; it was the clock. It fell and shattered into
pieces, like the pledge I gave and the promises Wendy made. The clock can be fixed, but nothing can be done to mend the broken hearts and bonds.
Craved Showcase

Wai Wai Leung Vivian

In my heart, there were cracks between the broken pieces and the other broken pieces. I try to use liquid to fill them. Just as I fill my schedule with various kinds of activities. Whenever I am busy, I have no time to swirl in my emotions. Those liquid, I consider them wine.

Pupils learn to spell the word dinosaur because of the spoon-feed education in kindergarten; students learn to recite the definition of an endangered species because of the rise of Wikipedia. Researchers learn to convince us the number of endangered species because of their technique in using Google.

But few of us know why we need to protect the scarce resources.

When I was young, I do not follow rules because I feel like I already understand that why we need to protect the scarce resources. But soon I learn from the society that rules are set to be the strictly followed. Otherwise, I will be the scarce resources…’

I am lying on my yellowish couch placed in the centre of my living room, on my right, there was a plain desk. My Mac book glued to this plain, hard desk for years, being switched on for another forty-eight hours. Thanks to apple’s durable battery life, I managed to finish my essays accounting for drawbacks in the current education system.

I snooze and I randomly stare at my green album containing my records of high school life. I opened it gently, seeing plenty of memorable photos and memory flashes back.

In 2007, inside the bar and restaurant in Gold Coast, Tuen Mun. I found a scarce resource together with my ex-boyfriend. He handed me that bottle of drink without saying anything. He just said it is good and I trusted him. It was a magnetic temptation which should be forbidden to try. I was only seventeen. That wasn’t a whisky, that wasn’t a cocktail either. I hardly know anything about alcohol back then. When I was seventeen, I thought what was in front of my eyes was beautiful fireworks in the sky, breeze from the shore
and my first romantic scene. But three years later, I discovered the breathtaking truth.

It tastes too bitter to be recalled. I just knew that after I drank this alcohol and drove in a high way without conscience. That’s all I knew. I opened my eyes with all my effort, I tried to see by I am blinded by a white light. Next, I am waking up with no ease in a hospital, everyone was there, my mother, my brother, my sister and my best friend Scarlet, everyone except my ex-boyfriend. All of the above mentioned character took turn to take care of me when I still relied on a wheelchair.

Your family was waiting and crying for three damn hours,’ Scarlet sobbed. ‘What were you thinking?’

I don’t know’ I said.

Maybe she is not even thinking, she was doing eighty five in a thirty five!’ the police-officer charged me for speed driving.

Now that I know, I gulped down a pinot noir without knowledge of its price. I hated my ex-boyfriend for leaving me without reason. Deep in my heart, I know he left with a reason. But the other part of my heart keeps reminding me that the past is already in the past. I should move on. Sensibly, I focused on investment of wine, maybe his affection for me is just a passion, but the knowledge of investment that he has is long-lasting to me. I started to do a small business with the inherited knowledge of fashion by the money I earned from investment. Later, I even invest on wines and I would like to find out what nearly cost a life.

Nonetheless, I heard that pinot Noir is an excellent drink in the upper social ranking group. I thought the idea of promoting this thrilling alcohol to my investors so that I could make a huge fortune. For this reason, I kept that precious bottle in my chest, occupying one third of its capacity. And searching its history has long been my first priority.
Two Villanelles of Hate and Love

Andrew Barker

Today maybe our last day together

Today, maybe, our last day together
Yet now, as we are wrenched apart I know,
We rise from the ruins of what we were.

We both knew this would not last forever.
Do we realize as we turn to go
Today, maybe, our last day together?

Days float through life like raven feathers
Heavy our hearts, yet light your smiles and so
We rise from the ruins of what we were.

We have kept our troubles under cover,
Keep all our thoughts down, smiling not to show
Today, maybe, our last day together.

I see your tears, see the darkness quiver
We keep these smiles, desperately we joke
And rise from the ruins of what we were.

As we part there will not be another
To make me feel such sweetness, and although
Today, maybe, our last day, together
We rise from the ruins of what we were.

Welded to reason by brittle metals.

Welded to reason by brittle metals
Your solder will smolder, then burn and break
People in love do not split they splinter.

At the boarder with worn out credentials
Your misdated papers crumble and flake.
Welded to reason by brittle metals

Tears will soon rust your tale as its teller,
Though your voice holds strong it's your hands that shake.
People in love do not split they splinter

And this is a truth hope tries to throttle;
All shatter, all fall apart in heartache.
Welded to reason by brittle metals

You can't see the flaw as one structural;
A fissure is there in the love we make.
People in love do not split they splinter,

’Til a trap-door comes down on the future.
No swift clean crack, then admit our mistake.
Welded to reason by brittle metals,
People in love do not split they splinter.
Memos to Little Jo

Qiao Liangyu 乔靓瑜

Jo, you may find it very interesting to read something about you but you’ve never heard of. I wrote this as my diary, and now it may serve as the answers to your endless questions. I hope so.

How you get your name

I think it had better have a same character in the name as yours. It’s a kind of bond, so people will recognize you are siblings immediately. Which one would you like it to be? Liang(舰, means good-looking) or Yu(瑜, means jade)?’ dad asks me, with a delighted look on his face, his right hand gesticulating in the air.

I sit on the couch, mutter in an unhappy voice. Don’t name it Liang; it will look like a joke if the person is not that pretty. That’s what happens to me.

‘Oh don’t say that, you are quite pretty in our eyes. Maybe we should think of another character describing beautiful and good-looking. How about Jing if it’s a girl(婧, means pretty)?’

Dad answers subconsciously and absent-mindedly. He is still writing some optional characters in the air. He doesn’t even look at me.

See, I knew it! With you, my little sister/brother coming, no one would ever pay any attention to me any more! The feeling of being ignored makes me want to cry. Those days with my mum and dad’s favour and love are gone, I think. Now all that my mum cares about is the stupid foetus (forgive me, but…) in her belly. All that my dad cares about is mum. This is our family event of the top importance, and I am even not a part of it! For the first time in my nine-year life experience, I start to think seriously that I am going to fall into disfavour.

Why you are a girl

I have noticed that something unusual is going on with mum, her nausea at the sight of grease and the smell of tooth paste, her lying on bed all day, and vomiting frequently. But I didn’t know what was going on, I just
thought she was ill and would be OK in a few weeks. It's only yesterday that I was informed of your existence. A woman of the neighbourhood stopped me and said mysteriously.

'Your mum is to give birth to a baby. You know that, right? They won't love you as much as they do now, believe me. Parents always love the younger kid, especially when the younger it is a boy. So prepare for the next, poor little girl.'

I was startled and kept thinking about what she said all day long. I can't believe this! Am I going to be an unwanted child? The coming baby is going to 'share' parents with me!

Almost every one of my playmates in the neighbourhood is the only kid in their family. And I am one of them, but I won't be in a few months. I felt completely at a loss.

The fridge is now filled with bananas, pineapples and my favourite chocolate and jellies. But they are bought for my mum, and dad won't let me eat, saying that I've eaten enough. Impossible! I could never eat enough chocolate and jellies! My resentment to the unborn baby deepens with the dissatisfaction of not having the delicious fridge food. Not only do I have to share parents with it, but food too!

But I guess there is nothing I can do to overturn the situation, except that I can show my indifference. My mum asks me whether I would like it a little sister or brother, I pretend to be disinterested, but in my heart I really hope it to be a little girl—because if it is a boy, my situation may be worse—that's what the neighbours told me. I tell mum calmly that I'd prefer to play with a little girl.

And so, months later, you come out to this world, as a girl. I think you should give me credit for that, shouldn't you?

What makes us sisters

You were just born, but I'm already ten years old. That's a long time. Now you are approaching ten, while I am going to be twenty. Frankly speaking, you are the first person to remind me of my age. I always see myself as a kid, but I have to act more mature when I'm with you. Well, I must confess that to be less mature than you is basically a mission impossible.
I actually have done some sister stuff: to hold you in my arms and show you around the house when you keep crying, and play as some silly roles to make you laugh. I can hold you for an hour without taking a rest! Even I myself find it incredible.

It's really funny to say that when we were born, we both weighed over ten pounds, which made us very well-known in the hospital. I fail to remain that big physique later, but you still have your advantage: you are always the tallest and, say, the most robust girl in the class. The milestone of remaining our family physique is all on you now. I am a little ashamed as your elder sister.

But except for our weight, you are very different from me. You can start a conversation with strangers easily while I tend to be silent; you love maths and science while I immerse myself into novels and prose; you don't care your grades in school while I build my poor confidence on them; you are a good painter while I love music much more than art; you are happy to run errands for me when I just want to watch TV at home; when watching Happy Goat and Big Big Wolf, you love the Happy Goat while my favourite is the Lazy Goat; yes, you seem to be everything that I'm not, but that's part of the reason why I love you so much. We inherit the same genes, share parents (and food, of course), yet we become unique individuals, isn't that the magic of life?

I accepted you reluctantly at first, yet now I am truly grateful of your company for the rest of my life.

Do you remember that I used to 'force' you to call me 'super super...super good sister'? At this moment, I feel like saying the same to you, my dear dear... dear little sister. Miss you.
presque vu

(French for ‘almost seen’) a phenomenon is an instance of knowing something that cannot immediately be recalled

It is called Tip of the Tongue in English

The experience of TOT appeared in non-academic literature as early as 1885. Anton Chekhov's short story "A Horsey Name" is about the main character's tip-of-the-tongue experience involving a surname
La réponse est ......moi aussi!

Sofie Yuen Kar Long

Can anyone tell me what ethics is? His voice echoes and there is a silence in the lecture hall, a typical scene in Hong Kong classrooms. 'Let’s look at the lecture note, P.12,' he continues and it seems he is talking to himself in a big cave. 'Ethics is......' All the pupils in the lecture hall have their faces down to their notes, some of them are jotting notes, some of them are day-dreaming and some of them are dozing.

Except Joy.

Joy is a Year 2 student from the Department of Architecture. She is taking PHI 216 Practical Ethics, as her free elective. She is studying architecture because her father wants her to inherit his business. She comes from a rich family but not a happy one. Her parents work from morning till night, from Monday to Sunday. 'Hotel' is the word she uses to describe her big house where people come and go without leaving any love behind. Ironically, she is totally different from her name Joy; gloominess and loneliness are better words for her indeed. She does not like to talk; maybe this is the reason why she does not have friends. No one has seen her smile before. Why? Why does not she smile? Why does she always feel unhappy? She has good academic results, a good appearance, wealth and dozens of romantic admirers, all the things that people long for. She should be satisfied. Why does she feel bad?

Joy has no love. She knows everything but love. If you ask her what love is, she would probably say, 'love? What the hell is that?' Parental love, romantic love and friends’ love are not in her dictionary.

Joy is playing with her pen and looking at the professor blankly. Their eyes meet. He suddenly feels a kind of shyness and his ears grow red. Unexpected! Well, it is understandable for him to blush as students’ heads are usually down nowadays. The last time he had eye contact with students in class was fifteen years ago. Isn’t that awful? Or are students nowadays more enthusiastic about his notes? He always thinks positively. Please be reminded that the mid-term quiz will be held next week. Please show
up... on time.' All the students disappear before he finishes the kind reminder. He got used to this situation long ago. Yet, the head-up girl is still in the lecture hall. What a surprise for him. He walks to her while she is tidying her notes.

'Why are you still here? No lesson afterwards?'

'No... She answers without looking at him.

'Well... good... need not to be hurried...' He feels a bit nervous.

'Right. She is still keeping her head down, avoiding eye contact.

See you in the tutorial then,' he adds, continuing his way out of the lecture hall.

'Professor...' She pauses shyly and looks at him with her bright brown eyes.

'Yes?' He turns towards her in surprise.

'What do you think about teacher-student love?'

'Well... according to ethics and social norms, this is unacceptable as...'

he wants to continue but Joy interrupts him.

'I'm asking about your opinion but not the theories.'

'Um... I haven't thought about that before... What is your view?'

Silence.

'I like you.'

Another longer silence.

He is speechless, totally speechless, at this moment. What should he say?

His mind is blank and it seems he is going to faint at any moment.

'Well... good... no, I mean... um... actually I've got another lesson now and I have to go [What a bad excuse]. See you later.' He leaves the lecture hall as quickly as he can.

He is shocked. Without believing that a pretty young lady would like a middle-aged, fifty-five years old, man. She deserves a young, handsome and energetic guy but not a boring professor! On the other hand, he feels a bit excited. I'm still charming enough to attract a young lady,' he reassures himself.

He has not been in love or felt any love for a very long time. He has been married for almost fifteen years and his wife is dull. Their relationship is all about responsibility and commitment but not love. They do not chat much
and his home, for him, is another silent lecture hall. His work is not challenging at all. Every year, he teaches PHI103 Introduction to Ethics’ and PHI 216 Practical Ethics’. What a routine life! Although he meets a lot of students and colleagues every day, he does not feel respect, care or love from them at all. He is dying to get out of the campus, as well as his ordinary monotonous life and go to somewhere else. However, he is not a teenager anymore and has a family to feed; reality stops him from being wayward. He gets nothing from the job but a stable and appreciable salary.

After Joy’s love confession, she does not show up in the next tutorial session; this is not surprising. What goes beyond his expectation is that he feels fidgety and uneasy. He keeps on looking for her pretty face, her bright eyes and her long dark brown hair in the classroom. However, reality disappoints him. She is not in class. Why? Is she sick? Is she angry with him?

Because of her absence, he cannot focus on his class. So he ends the class earlier than usual. Is he missing her? He is confused. But the truth is, she has invaded his life and his heart.

It is a Saturday night. His wife goes out for a women-only mahjong party. Being alone in a big house, he decides to go to Lan Kwai Fong by himself. He wanders for a while and he goes into a pub. This is not a very big pub but rather cozy. Once he walks into the pub, a poster catches his attention very quickly. There is a huge Tour Eiffel on the poster. Paris; a magical and romantic city.

When he sits down, he notices a familiar figure. She is Joy; he is very sure about it. She is looking at the poster; her heart has flown to Paris. ‘Hi.’ he approaches her. She gives him a curious look. Loneliness is written all over her pretty face.

‘You like Paris?’ he asks.

‘Yea. My father promised that he’ll take me to Tour Eiffel sometime but he forgot,’ her gaze stays on the poster.

‘Well, maybe you can go there with someone else. How about your friends?’

She shrugs, ‘I will go there by myself.’
Their eyes meet. This time, their eye contact is very different from the one in class. He is embarrassed but he just cannot take his eyes off her, her face and her attractiveness. She is a magnet. No one knows what kind of force pushes them together; a rush of lust is running through his body, his blood vessels and finally, his heart. For Joy, for the first time in her life, she feels joy, excitement and attraction. They get closer, closer and closer. They cannot resist and are totally defeated by this special force. They kiss. An unforgettable kiss for both of them. This is not his first time to kiss but this is the sweetest, deepest and the most whole-hearted kiss he has ever had and given. Unexpectedly, this is her very first kiss. She is not a skilled and experienced kisser. This brings him back to his youth—a time that he had not needed to worry about anything; those good old, wild days.

The next morning, he wakes up early and finds Joy beside him, naked. What the hell am I doing? He thinks. He feels refreshed and energized and these overcome the feeling of guilt. Looking at her sleeping is a joyful thing. She is even more beautiful now than when she is awake. It seems that she is an angel with broken wings who has accidentally fallen into the human world. He doesn’t wake her up and just slips away quietly. When he gets home, his wife is back and sleeping like a pig. The shock of reality is always depressing.

After that night, Joy disappears. She does not go to his class anymore. Where has she gone? He tries all the means to contact her but fails. The only thing he can do is to wait. Few days later, he receives an e-mail from the department which announces that Joy has withdrawn from the university. He is totally stunned.

He cannot stand his life without Joy and applies a long vacation to free his mind. His wife pays no attention and does not care about his short break; her world is fully occupied by mahjong.

His first stop is France—pays d’amour. Very ironic.

After the landing, he goes to a café and orders a cup of espresso immediately. Espresso is his favourite as the taste of bitter is similar to life. Most of our experiences are sour and unsweetened. Life is not always as
fruitful or smooth as people think. Yet, the interesting thing is, if there is only the sweet side, we will feel bored and meaningless. Humans are so complicated.

While he is waiting for the espresso, he sees a familiar silhouette. She is one of the waitresses and is serving other customers. Her smile is bright and unforgettable. He has never seen such a beautiful smile. Meanwhile, a male customer calls her, ‘Salut, Joy! Comment ça va?’

Joy? Is she really the Joy he is looking for? Before he comes up with the answer, the young lady turns around and sees him. At first, surprised; and then, a smile.

‘Bonjour, monsieur.’
‘Bonjour… Joy?’
‘Oui! It’s been a long time, how have you been?’
‘Oh, I am good. I am here for a vacation.’
‘That’s great! France est une belle place. J’aime beaucoup d’être ici.’
‘Good… you look gorgeous!’
‘Merci beaucoup!’

They look at each other for a long time.
Joy… I… um… I miss you so much…’
She does not say a word, only a sunshine-liked smile and then she walks off.

At this moment, all the lights on Tour Eiffel turn on and shine like a huge star. Although Joy does not answer, both of them know the answer deep down in their heart. This is just the beginning of the long and winding road.
I really love my grandparents. Somehow I haven’t seen them a lot since I moved to Hong Kong, especially after my promotion to Form 6. It was grandpa’s birthday about two years ago when I last saw them. I remember that day. I finished my work and went directly to the railway station.

There were new trains on the Guang-shen railways. The name is Hexichao, which means ‘Harmony and Comfort’. It’s not peak-loaded hours. The train looked nice with a lot of empty seats, without that strange smell of people’s sweat.

I was exhausted. I boarded, sat on the brand new arm chair, then closed my eyes.

My grandpa, who is eighty, lives with my grandma since I left for Hong Kong. Before then, my mother and I and my two aunts lived together with my grandparents in an old house in the oldest area of Guangzhou. It was just like an old fashioned Chinese family.

Every morning my grandparents would prepare breakfast and after eating, one by one, we would go out to work or school, waving goodbye, and reminding each other what time dinner would be served. Every weekend my two cousins and their parents came for dinner. I loved to play with my cousins, although there were always some little fights between us. Being the smallest child I never got the blame. It was the time when I was always innocent. No one had ever beaten me seriously except dad and grandpa. I can still remember being beaten for sneaking out of school, and how much it hurt to be hit with a plastic water tube. But overall the family was nice, the neighbours were nice, life was nice.

There were lots of changes. Two aunts got married and moved to Australia, mum left for Hong Kong, another aunt retired from her superstore job, while uncle got promoted in his job at the ship factory and was so busy he seldom came home, even on weekends. At the same time my grandparents
were moved to a new flat in a new district. Then it was just me and my grandparents living together.

For two years we lived together, having meals, watching TV. Every night I slept on the same bed with grandma, listening to grandpa snore. Every morning grandpa woke me up and grandma made breakfast and we sat together to eat.
Four in the morning

Tai Nga Yan Dian

'This is the hour of lead
Remembered if unnoticed,
As freezing persons recall the snow—
First chill, then shiver, then the letting go.'

I woke up. My nose was still blocked; my eyes still wet. The alarm clock ticked: it’s four in the morning!

It was December, my nineteenth birthday, when my father reluctantly admitted that he had had a girlfriend for the last six years after he divorced his wife. At that moment, it was not surprising to me. For years, I had been speculating, actually hoping, that he was not alone. I was grateful to the woman, for all she had given to my Papa, financial support, unconditional love and a family. I was very pleased to see the sweet smile worn on his face every time he talked about her. My mother hated him for life; others told me that he was not a responsible father. Yet I could not understand the venom. Not only had I lost a father, but he also lost his little daughter, son and wife. I gave him my blessings and support to show I was not in grief nor was I disappointed. After
all, it was his life and his choices mattered most. By walking out from his life, I found no grief. I was even capable of being considerate: If I were him, acceptance would be all I wanted. The dinner was short because he had a date with his girlfriend. In the old days, he would have told me he needed to go to work. We waved goodbye. I left my father and went home alone. From the moment I was on my own, my mind went blank.

I was frozen in the train carriage. The fleeting images outside the window seemed to be blurrier tonight. I turned my iPod on and plugged my ears with the earphones. The first song was an echo of my father’s words. ‘I’m so pleased to hear that you are enrolled in the University. I am so proud of you!’

I was proud but the real blessing was his pride. It assured me he cared what I did or accomplished. I was not working alone for my own self. If I was happy, he would be happy too.

The next song, however, stamped out the joy I felt. ‘You know, I have put too much burden on my shoulders for years. My business is not doing well. I have a difficult time maintaining it. Luckily my girlfriend is very helpful in so many ways. She helps me a lot. We both are very happy for you! Now you have grown up and you can take good care of yourself. She is so eager to meet you. Maybe we should have dinner together some time!’

‘Yes, sure!’ I smiled.

At that moment, I was glad. I sincerely felt happy for him. But when I was alone in the train, my nose suddenly felt sour as if irritated by ethane. Tears welled up in my eyes but never rolled down to my cheek. I could not quite figure out what it was but I had a feeling of being expelled and abandoned, one more time. I held it back by a few deep breaths and reminded myself, I wanted him to find his better half. I wanted him to be happy. I should have wanted...’

In the next year, we did not meet during Lunar New Year and Mid-autumn festival, the most important festivals in Chinese culture. I told him I was going to grandmother’s place. It was not a lie but it was unusual. He was disappointed. I did not know if it was what I wanted but I felt awkward and uncomfortable to even imagine myself having dinner with his girlfriend. That
night seldom came up to my mind again. I lived my life as usual. It was not until 20th December, my 20th birthday when I realized the great impact it had made in my course of life.

We had dinner in a restaurant where my brother worked. He was on shift that night so he did join us. I invited one of my best friends to the dinner because now I felt embarrassed to be with my father alone. I no longer could talk to him freely as I did before. My friend, Bowling, was energetic and talkative. She was a guarantee of nice gatherings. We ate and casually chatted about the hottest news. After we finished criticizing Donald Tsang, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, my father asked me to come closer to him then he whispered,

You are going to have another brother! he announced excitedly.

I had imagined this scene. When my friend asked me how I would feel if my father had children with that woman, I told them that I would be very upset and never want to see my father again. I felt nothing for the kid but I did not want to build anything between him and me. Yet I had always been the greatest disappointment to myself.

Really? Congratulations! When will be the delivery? April. You know your father wasn’t educated. Will you suggest some names for your brother?

Of course! What radicals do you prefer? Have you been advised by any fortuneteller? my brain and mind was not cooperating.

Then we spent a great deal of time discussing about babies. He had the beam of light which I had never seen. This time, I found myself crying inside. I knew I had lied to my heart. It was just too much. I could bear the fact that he had a new wife but having another baby was way too much. It was not my brother besides. It was his son which had nothing to do with me. Why asked me to name it? Didn’t you know how hard it was for me to believe it? Please do not bring me into this family. If this should be the case, I would have no other alternatives but to be completely alone – do not need anybody and is not needed by anyone neither.

‘Happy Birthday, my sister!’ a waiter carrying a birthday cake came to us. It was my brother.
I looked at him wanting to tell him everything I had just heard but my father asked me to keep this secret for him. Soon I realized that it was coming. From my throat to nose, it was going to escape through my eyes. Yet I could not allow it. I squeezed the brightest smile I could provide and finished the cake in minutes to choke back the tears. When we were about to leave, my father invited me to visit his place after dinner but I rejected. I thought it was the top ten thoughtless invitations in my life. Then I went home like the living dead. It was a celebration of my birth but it felt like I was dying. When I was home and saw my mother, I suddenly felt pity for her. Now he had restarted the game. He had already had a new family and had found the meaning of his life again. What about her who was still living under the shadow of animosity and who still could not survive from the divorce?

I lay my head down knowing there was no way I could fall asleep tonight. It was 2a.m. My birthday was gone but the day extended. The passion and love I felt for my father had suddenly all gone. I did not want to hear anything about him anymore. I wanted him to disappear from my life forever. At the same time, I perfectly knew I still love him or I would not be in pain now. It was as if had betrayed my loyalty. It was as if my father was shared, my one and only father. Had he ever thought of us? It had been a tough road without him by my side. I had spent so many years learning how to survive without him. Did I have to learn it again? As the questions kept popping into my head, I started realizing that maybe I was making things unnecessarily difficult. So I called my boyfriend trying to relieve my agonies by confession. Commemorating is the best way to forget sorrows. Though we were having a big problem in our relationship at that time, he was the only one who could bear with me even at small hours. He might not console or encourage me but I did not know I was looking for from this call. In fact, after I repeated the exact words from my father and confessed my feelings to him, I had already felt much better. I told him that though it was heartbreaking, I still wanted to see him live well. He scolded me.

Dian, you are such a hypocrite! If you are not happy, you don't have to pretend so. Why do you do that? he said furiously.
Because I think it is the best for him and maybe for me too?' I innocently replied, shocked by his wrath.

So you are a hypocrite! You don't mean it when you congratulate him and you act as if you are pleased. It is not fair to the baby you know?' he nearly yelled.

I was irritated by his nonsensical charges so I fought back. 'First of all, it has nothing to do with the baby. Besides, what's wrong with what I did? I don't want anything to destroy the relationship between my father and me. If I was selfish enough to complain and if I told him I was sad, he would be very upset too and may blame himself for life! He also would think that I hated him which is definitely not the case.'

'Whatever you say, if you decide to bless him, you lose the reasons to feel blue. I think you are just jealous of him,' he hung up.

My cheeks finally felt the wet. I knew I gave him my blessing wholeheartedly, I did. I believed I sincerely felt excited for the new coming life. But did I lie to myself unconsciously? Was I jealous of my father for his happy family which I had lost and which was lost because of him? Was I childish enough to be jealous? I thought I was too generous! I could think in his sides and decide the best thing to do. Didn't I do that? If it was wrong, what was I supposed to do then? This was it. Nothing could be changed except my own feelings. I thought it was the only way out. Why would I be accused? I did not understand the reproaches yet I was defenseless. It was not impossible that I would be jealous of him even if I never wanted to be. I wanted my father to understand it was difficult but I did not want him to feel sorry for me. But was it even possible?

Doubting oneself is the most dangerous thing to do. I was insane enough to question myself which brought me the wickedest nightmare ever that night. And when I was awoken by a shock, it was already 4a.m.

Four in the morning, one might see it as a continuation of the day before or an ending of it. One hour later, the sun rises and the sky is bright. This is the last hour to hide the deepest grieves and sorrows in the dark. If
outlived, those numbness and unconsciousness would be remembered. And when the day begins, those secrets are completely exposed followed by the letting go. Will there be one day that I finally become what I wanted to be? One never knows until it comes.
I gave birth to a baby girl.

She had beautiful curly hair and pink tender skin. She kept giggling and punched her little fist to her teddy bear toy. She was so cute that everyone could not help kissing her.

Yes, she was lovely. She was my angel.

Suddenly the sky went dark, and the cloud blocked the sun. It was about to rain.

My girl wiggled to the window and tried to reach the handle of the window. Half of her body was outside the window. ‘Get off there!’ I shrieked to her when I realized what she was trying to do. But it was too late. At that moment, she lost her balance and disappeared from my eyes, forever.

No!’ I cried. I found myself sitting on my bed. It was a dream, a nightmare. Sweat kept running down my forehead and I felt extremely frustrated, as if I did have a baby girl.

The following day, I failed to get rid of the nightmare. All I thought about was the face of my dead baby girl. I was suffering from it. Freud’s theory was something I did not bother to refer to since his interpretations were always related to sex.

I wandered in the library, among shelves of magazines. Finally, my attention lied on the latest Economist, and the cover story was gendercide, revealing the cruel truth that a hundred million baby girls were aborted, abandoned or killed by their parents as the result of Confucian preference for boys over girls. I was silent—it must have something to do with my ominous dream.

Ironically, in China, the ratio of man and woman is 120:100; on the other hand, increasingly more women have difficulty finding a husband, even a boyfriend. This group of girls, who are called ‘leftover’, are mostly well-educated, well-paid and living in big modern cities. One of the reasons accounting for their awkward situation is their successful career. This
intimidates many male-chauvinists. For those men, they prefer to marry a college-graduated wife than a doctor-degree girlfriend, and only by doing this can they retain their silly authority of being a man.

We adore Virginia Woolf and Susan Sontag, not only because they show their conscientiousness to women’s life and fought for female right, but they themselves are role models of self-reliance and self-respect. Even though they were assumed to be unhappy and unsuccessful only because their unsuccessful marriage and lesbian tendency. In light of those people’s statement, the ultimate goal of a woman lies in her marriage. Ironically, if it is not the truth, how many of us will admit, without any guilt, that marriage is not crucial to a woman?

There is little meaning to argue how to become a feminist or the meaning of being a feminist. The point is how to really improve woman’s social status in the world, especially in China. The century-old stereotype of woman-following behind men, with a bucket-should be rid of. Women’s liberation movement has been running for more than a century, but why it has always been slow in progress? It is a problem worth considering.

I miss my baby girl. I miss those a hundred million baby girls I have never met before.
Anxiety

Meiye Chan

I have a habit of reading two newspapers every day, Ming Pao and Xing Dao Daily; however, my focus will always be its editorial and literary supplement. Sometimes I am not sure I read it for information or enjoyment, as I find myself simply glancing through those texts anxiously and don't really read them. I glance at them so quick that I actually don't see what they mean. I seem to rush over those pages and feel greatly relieved when I finish flipping them all. I cannot help but feeling anxious.

Things don't always look so bad, anyway. Sometimes I will learn some interesting anecdotes from the newspapers too, for example, inspiring stories from some columns or thoughtful review on certain social issues. When reading the newspaper, I also got to know anxiety felt by other people. Recently HK society has been talking a lot about the minimum payroll, saying that it is unfair to set the wage per hour to $20 HK, since it is not enough to cover monthly expenses. I was surprised that those working in restaurants actually earn less than $20 HK per hour while those specialists in business, more than $300. The gap is so huge. I learned from my friend who teaches part time tuition once a week that she was paid forty each hour. Guiding a primary student doing their homework must be much more easier than serving in the restaurant, mopping tables and tidying up the mess on the dining table; it is indeed unfair in terms of labour. It must be hard for those who earned less than $20 to make ends meet. Their anxiety is an issue of butter and bread; of life and death.

How frustrating they must have been!

How do I find my way out to tackle with all these anxieties, of my own or of others through reading papers? One of my ways is through participating in voluntary work. My latest volunteer work was about visiting those elderly living alone in the suburbs, and I found that their living styles can be very difficult. Such volunteer work helps me reduce my anxiety because I feel I am contributing to the society too. My world does not, and should not, revolve
only around my studies, it should have something more. It should relate to people, so I feel really good when participating in social service work.

Life will be more difficult once one starts working, people say. Well, I suppose the anxiety which troubles me now must be of good purpose to help me cope with the bigger pressure in future. Just like Roman wasn’t built in one day, so does it take time to build ourselves up to be someone with stronger character to face the challenges in life.

May all of us grow stronger day by day, while conquering our own anxiety.
**Long summer**

Chen Huiqian Phoenix 陈慧倩

One hot summer day, a strange kid walked slowly towards school. Although the kid had a boyish haircut, you could still tell that she was a girl by the big colorful T-shirt for middle-aged women that the kid wore. You were even more surprised when you found that one of the sleeves was empty. Was the girl one-armed? You stared at her and thought aloud.

I am that girl. At that time, I was fourteen years old.

In that long hot summer of the year 2004, disasters came to visit me one after another. Five days after my grandpa's death, I was caught in a shower and fell off my bicycle. With mud and tears covered my face and clothes, I went to a friend's home which was close to the accident scene to ask for help.

My mother was informed and she hurried to take me to the 3rd People’s Hospital at once.

My arm was broken.

I went to the 3rd People’s Hospital to get treated for about one week, still hoping that my broken arm would soon get well, but the x-ray showed that something was wrong about my broken bone. The broken bone didn't grow in the right direction because the doctor didn't deal with the broken bone correctly for the first time.

Will this leave any bad effect on her arm, doctor? My mother asked.

The doctor answered my mother’s question indifferently. She will probably have one arm longer than another if you do nothing about it.

I saw my mother bite her lips, trying to swallow her anger. She said ‘Thank you’ to the doctor politely and we left.

Annoyed with the irresponsibility of the doctor, we decided to go to another hospital to have an operation as soon as possible.

The day of my first operation finally came.

The white hallway to the operating room seemed endless. I dragged to the operating room. It was cold. Several doctors were already there. They were all in white. Masks covered their faces. They all looked the same.
After the anesthetist gave me an injection on the scruff of my neck, he asked me to lie down on the operating-table. I lay there, gazing at the ceiling of the room, hearing my heart beat wildly, waiting for the operation to begin. The operation began when I could feel nothing of my right arm after the anesthesia. I saw nothing but the ceiling. It was strange that I could still feel my right arm again when the doctors were grasping it and pulling it. It hurt. My tears started to roll down. I tried to stop myself from crying out. Then I heard the noise of an electrical drill. I dared not turn my face to see what was going on, I fixed my eyes on the ceiling, began to sing a broken song while tears rolled down from my face and choked my throat. I tried to ignore the horrible noise. But I failed. The operation lasted for about forty minutes, but I felt it must have lasted for hours, days, or years. When the doctor asked me to sit up, I couldn’t help to see my right arm. It was wrapped with bandages. But the bandages failed to hide the two steel pins. One doctor bent my right arm and put the hand on my chest. Then they covered my arm and almost half of my body with plaster casts.

‘The operation is over, you are very brave.’ A doctor said softly.

The first time I went to school after the operation was very hard for me. I couldn’t stand other people staring at me, talking about me, peeking at me, or even laughing when they were walking towards me.

When I sat on my seat, praying that no one would notice me, my friend Ming came to me. She said, ‘Do you feel any better now? I have to admit that, you know…’

She paused and then studied my new appearance.

‘Of course she was going to laugh at me,’ I thought. I frowned and got ready to

‘You look pretty cool! You looked like the one-armed knight-errant Yang Guo! Hmm, if you were in a white t-shirt, it will be better…’

I burst into laughter.

Her words reminded me that I could see the disaster in a different way.

I started to learn to enjoy my time as a one-armed person.

I enjoyed reading a book when other classmates were having a PE class, I enjoyed writing and drawing by my left hand as an entertainment, I enjoyed
cooperating with my friend while playing computer games with my left hand and her right hand.

Sometimes some curious and brave kids asked me to show them the steel pins. They seemed all very surprised when they saw about five cm of the steel pins sticking out of my skin. They always asked questions like, ‘How did the doctor stick the pins in your bones?’

‘Oh, they used electrical drill.’

‘You, you must be kidding.’

I smiled and said nothing. I enjoyed looking at their facial expressions after they heard my answer.

One and a half months later, I went to hospital again. The doctor used a circular saw to cut the plaster casts and pincers to pull the pins out of my bone. Even though it was scary, I tried to face it with a smile. To my surprise, it didn’t hurt at all. I was finally free from the plaster casts and the steel pins.

When I catch a glimpse of the scars on my right arm, I can still feel the heat of that long summer. I can still hear the broken song resounding in the white and cold operating room. I can still see the one-armed boyish girl, still in her mother’s big T-shirt, studying other kids’ facial expression with a big smile.

Then I smile at all these memories about that long summer.
déjà vu

known as also called paramnesia, from Greek παρά ‘para,’ ‘near, against, contrary to’ + μνήμη ‘mnēmē,’ ‘memory’) or promnesia, is the experience of feeling sure that one has witnessed or experienced a new situation previously. Similar phenomena are déjà entendu ‘already heard’ (of music, etc.), 1965; and déjà lu ‘already read’
An experimental piece: Year of the Paper Tigers

Justin Hill

04/09/Tiger

I got off the plane, grabbed my luggage and ignored the gangs of sweet talking crooks at the airport and fought my way through the crowds to get a cab at the rank outside to the Friendship Hotel. Beijing was eating its way through an invasion of watermelons; the Yangste River was flooding, and while the cab ride used to take half an hour, now it took us more than a week.

The first three days were unbearably hot. The yellow cab inched along through the traffic jams, fumes of raw diesel condensed as a thick solid mess on the windscreen and pedestrians used torches to see through the smog.

On the morning of the fourth day we woke up to see black storm clouds come rumbling towards us. The sky rumbled with the thunder of articulated lorries, and when the storm hit us it obscured the sun. The clouds were thick with pollution, and rained viscous droplets of crude oil. Filthy gobbets splattered on the windscreen that was already thick with condensed diesel fumes. The driver didn't seem surprised. He reached under his seat and pulled out a pair of gas masks, one of which he gave to me. He flicked on the windscreen wipers and reached a hand out of his window to squirt detergent across the diesel slime. We put on our gas masks as the car inched forward, then stopped, and inched forward again.

New high-rise buildings daubed in white bathroom tiles that lined ten lane traffic jams.

'So has Beijing changed since you were here last?'

My voice was muffled. 'There are more cars,' I said.

'Yes,' he grinned through the plastic front of his mask. 'We are building up our motherland!'

On the fifth day the driver looked up from the steering wheel and asked me, 'So, what are you doing here?'

'I've come to work,' I said.

'You like China?'
'I just had a free year.'

He raised his eyebrows as the rain continued and windscreen wipers splattered diesel and washing up liquid to either side. 'I was working in Africa, but they had a war and I got evacuated. I phoned a friend here and he said he had a job.'

He nodded, and lit a cigarette which he inhaled by lifting up his mask for a drag. His mask filled up with cigarette smoke.

On the sixth day the driver woke up with a stretch and asked 'Why not settle down here? Get yourself a Chinese girlfriend,' he said, lighting up again and breathing smoke at me. 'Beijing girls like foreign men,' he encouraged, 'you have better bodies!' He pulled up the sleeve of his T-shirt to prove it to me. 'Look!' he said pinching his skinny bicep.

On the seventh day the cab finally passed out of the traffic, and swilled out into the courtyard of the Friendship Hotel, where the diesel rain stopped and I saw the sun again.

'Good Luck!' the driver shouted after I paid him. Then he gave me his name card. 'If you want to go anywhere, just give me a ring and I'll come and collect you!'

I put it in my wallet. 'Thanks.'

It didn't take me long to find the office I was looking for. The man I wanted was inside.

'Hi!' David said standing up from his desk. 'Come, let's have lunch!'

We walked out of the air conditioned office outside into the glaring summer heat where cicadas were chirping.

'How long did it take you to get here?' David asked.

'A week,' I told him, exhausted and generally pissed off.

'You were lucky, it took me a fortnight over Spring Festival,' he reassured me. 'A week is quite quick.'

We walked to a restaurant inside the hotel compound, just the other side of the tennis courts. The food was greasy, overcooked and overpriced. David didn't seem to mind. The service was friendly.

So, tell me about this job you've got lined up for me,' I said.
OK, I'll get straight to the point,' David said. 'The college isn't talking
to the foreign teachers, and the foreign teachers aren't talking to the college.'
They were two pieces of information that I wished he'd told me before I'd
flown in China.

'Why?' I asked.

'The dean thinks the foreign teachers have got Mad Cow Disease,' he
continued.

'Have they?' I asked.

'It's possible,' he admitted.

So you want me to go and teach there? ' I checked.

'It might not be as easy as it seems.'

'Thanks David. Umm, can we just get this other stuff straight? The
dean isn't talking to the teachers, but how about the waiban?'

'No problem,' David said, and I thought things were looking up. 'The
old waiban got on great with the foreigners.'

'Really?'

'Yes, she married one of them. The President's Office were furious.
They stopped talking to the teachers as well.'

'The leaders didn't even go to the wedding.'

'I considered. 'Do I have to go there?'

'No,' David said.

'And if I don't.'

'No one goes.'

'Why not?'

'It's just one of those places. There's no reason to go there at all. It's
perfectly nice though.'

'Tell me about it.'

'Three hundred thousand people. Vibrant industry. Restaurants, shops
- what can I say!'

'I got the point. So where is it?'

'Hunan, somewhere.'

'Anywhere near where Chairman Mao was born?'

'Quite near,' he said.

'How near?'
'About seven hours away.'

By car or train?

By car. About ten hours by train.'

'And what's it called again?'

Shaoyang,' he said and passed me a wad of photocopied sheets all folded in half and a bundle of photos. 'The last teachers left this. It's a bit of local history I think and some pictures, you might like to have a read.'

I picked it up. 'Thanks I will.'

I saw him the next day over lunch.

'What do you think?'

'It looks terrible,' I said, 'but no worse than anywhere else.'

'You'll go?'

'I think so.'

He pulled a train ticket out of his pocket. 'This evening, I got you a ticket.'

'What do you mean...'

'I knew you couldn't refuse.'

'The railway lines are open?'

I checked. 'Trains started getting through the floods to Hunan yesterday. There should be no problem.'

I'd been in China long enough to beware such assurances, but that evening I climbed onto the Number K2 train to Shaoyang and it set off with a violent start that spilt tea over the woman opposite me.

The train was full of Hunanese peasants heading home for the harvest, and it trundled due south for thirty hours. The carriages rattled through the night, clu-unk, clu-unk, clu-unk! and I lay awake in the dark and sweated out the summer heat. Outside it was the typical scenery of northern China - all black and white barren country with the occasional skeletal tree grasping at the wind, a vivid yellow gash running through it all - the serpent Dragon of the Yellow River, who had recently gone off to try life as a lake.

At six a.m. I suddenly discovered that I'd fallen asleep by waking up, and looked out of the window to see the floods. We had left the two tone
northern country by crossing the Yangste Lake, and now we were in a
landscape of colour. There was brown water from here to the horizon, lapping
around telegraph poles. The grey tiled roofs of red brick houses that couldn’t
float. White polystyrene cups bobbed in flocks like swimming ducks and on a
little green island a water buffalo lay enjoying the promise of limitless water.

This lasted for hours, and despite the colour I very soon I got bored of
the same filthy water from the train wheels to the horizon and lay down and
read a book where a man travelled up to the source of the Yangste. But that
was almost as boring, so I spend my day restlessly getting bored of my book
and then getting bored of the floods.

By evening of the next day the floods eventually gave way to a
landscape of limestone hills furry with pine trees, surrounded with rich green
paddy fields and tarmaced roads that were clogged with colourful rural traffic.
They were driven by terrified peasants who drove with their eyes closed and
their hair electrocuted with dirt.

After two days travel the train pulled up with a gasp of exhaustion in a
scrap yard of concrete buildings. I sat up and peered out of the window and
took a good look at my new home, Shaoyang.

Before I was allowed to get off the train I was quizzed by a man from
the Office of Alien Affairs who had a clip board and a fountain pen that
wouldn’t write. He demanded to see my medical certificate and then took me
to the police station in a dog kennel. I was chained to the wall as I waited for
my turn to come.

‘Are you Justin Hill?’ asked a small man whose face slipped into a smile
when he forgot to concentrate on looking serious. He carried a sign in his
hand, a scarlet sign with red letters that said ‘Welcome Mr. Justin Hill.’

‘Yes,’ I said, adjusting the chains so I could shake his hand.

‘Good. I’m Harry, but you can call me Sun An!’

Sun An was there to help me through the Chinese bureaucracy. He
unlocked the kennel door; we went into the office where lots of people were
bustling around doing nothing. They wore green uniforms that were
decorated with bits of gold coloured plastic, had to stand up to tuck their
stomachs in and only looked up from their newspapers to shout angrily at someone.

Can you dance? Sun An asked me.

‘Not really,’ I told him. Why?’

His face relaxed into a smile. ‘These policemen love dancing.’

When the policeman could no longer ignore us one of them snapped at Sun An who shook his head and smiled at me.

‘I think I will have to dance,’ he smiled with a resigned look.

Sun An took off his shoes and socks and performed a traditional Chinese dance on the desk. The policemen were not impressed.

‘A waltz!’ one of them ordered, and Sun An jumped down and held out his arms to take his shadow for a spin around the office. The policeman tapped his foot as Sun An moved.

‘Enough!’ the policeman shouted after ten minutes. ‘Enough!’

‘How was it?’ Sun An asked wiping away a little perspiration.

‘Not good,’ the policeman said severely. ‘Come back tomorrow and waltz properly!’

We drove back to the college in the president’s car. It was a Chinese-style black limousine. It had four wheels, windows, a windscreen and an exhaust, and lots of little buttons, which, when pressed, lit up a sign that said ‘Don’t Touch.’ There was a sofa in the back, with two Mickey Mouse cushions.

The driver was an aggressive little man who careered out of the exit, and roared at a woman whose child ran in front of the car. ‘You can fuck all right, but you don’t know how to bring children up!’

‘Problem with this country is the peasants!’ he turned and snarled out the words, chewing a cigarette stub as he did so. ‘All they do is have children!’

The driver disliked peasants. He ran three of them down on the way back. There was a thud, their arms and mouths flashed past the window, and the driver gave a grunt of satisfaction.

Sun An was sweating when we arrived at the college.

‘What’s up?’ I asked him.

‘I can’t waltz,’ he said.
Sun An went back to the police station alone the next day and two days later he returned with his broad smile wilting and handed me my papers. 'Did you have to dance the waltz?' I asked.

'No,' he smiled, 'they wanted me to do the tango. Luckily I am good at the tango.'

With my papers I felt it was safe for me to go out and have a look around my new home.

Before Liberation Shaoyang had been a hub of river traffic, but recent government policy had sidelined the place, till it didn't so much shrink, but get dwarfed by it's neighbours. During the Open Door Policy it had been awash with gangsters, men who traded in opium and smuggled televisions, and who imposed their own code upon the city by cutting off the left hand and gouging out the right eye.

The depredations of the gangsters became so lawless that the even the police had to do something, so they gave them buses and let them drive south to Guangdong.

With modernisation a New City had been planted on the far bank of the Zijiang River which quickly grew into a sprawl of brothers and gambling dens. The brothels were adorned with neon silhouettes of naked women with prominent nipples.

'Chicken Garden,' one said, because whores were nicknamed Wild Chickens.

'Red Fox Castle,' said another, because in Chinese legends Fox Fairies were bewitchingly beautiful and always lured honest men to terrible ends. Poor Party officials were still being lured to their doom, but unlike the men in the stories they were not in any way honest.

In all this Shaoyang was pretty much standard for a rural Chinese town. The thing that really made Shaoyang different, so the locals claimed, was that it was so dirty.

But they were wrong.

What made Shaoyang different was that it was a City of Artists.
It was hard to equate the artistic richness of Shaoyang after a glance, because at first and at all subsequent impressions it was such an ugly city. But it hadn’t always been so.

I saw photos of Old Shaoyang, taken in the 1930s, that showed a compressed town with streets too narrow for anything but coolies. Wooden building nibble away the streets where long robed men and shocked peasants stare straight at the camera. Old Chinese characters hang down on long signboards, and the paved cobbles shine with the daily polishing of thousands of straw sanded feet.

In the days when Shaoyang was beautiful it always been cut off from land transport. Before Liberation the only way to reach the place was a week’s journey along a narrow path paved with limestone blocks that was only wide enough for wheelbarrows. Where each barrow way entered town there was a stone archway carved with dragons and phociixes. These archways were dedicated to Shaoyang’s most famous widows - pubescent girls married to wizened sages searching for Immortality - and who, after Immortality failed their husbands, spent the rest of their long lives dressed in white, which was the colour of death.

The whole Shaoyang population, who were Han, had been introduced en bloc after an old and forgotten war whose cause no one could remember. Some said they were fleeing the invasions of nomadic horsemen who had ridden down from the north through the holes in the Great Wall. Others said they were fleeing endless civil wars, others that they were fleeing poverty. Whatever the reason, Han people had been pushing down into Hunan in many waves of migration that started nearly two thousand years ago. As they spread south, they squeezed out the native people, the Miao, Tujia, Dong and Yao into the hills, where they still lived today, as tourist attractions for teams of international officials who did pointless studies on them and then flew back to Geneva, Brussels or New York.

An old man, who spent his afternoons in a smoky old room rimmed with cane chairs where the shrink wrapped skeletons of old men and women listened to local opera played by a band of nicotine brown enthusiasts, including a frenzied half man half turtle on the zither, told me a dream he’d had as a child, which he claimed was the oldest memory the city had. He said.
the Shaoyang people had come from an area in the north where they built with mud brick, and where there were ten suns that used to take it in turns to shine. But one day the suns argued with each other and forgot their proper place, and all shone together. Because there were ten suns in the sky the land got hotter and hotter, till nothing grew.

The opera blasted out, shrill singing, screeching of the strings and the pause, then a clok! from the percussion. I leaned in close to hear the man over the noise.

But then a strong man called Houdi took his bow and arrows and shot the suns one by one, he crooned as he sucked on his cigarette. When he was about to shoot the last sun the people cried out and stopped him, saying they needed one sun left to give them light and warmth, and so he stopped.

I nodded.

'And that is why China has only one sun!' he grinned.

'So does the rest of the world,' I told him.

'You only have one sun?' he asked in amazement.

'Of course,' I told him. 'All the world only has one sun.'

'You have our sun?!' he spat in disgust.

'I think we all share it.'

He tutted and shook his head.

In the last years of the Qing Dynasty the Shaoyang people worshipped a man they called The Victorious Scholar. His name had been He JingSheng, and he was the town magistrate who had in 1902 opposed the building of a telegraph wire into the city. He was a old style patriot and dismissed this barbaric toy because it offended his Confucian values. The Great Sage did not need a talking wire, so why did they?

The provincial governor of Hunan was a reformer without patience for die-hards like He JingSheng, and he called He to a conference in the capital to discuss the matter of the telegraph. He JingSheng was met on the borders of Shaoyang by a military escort, who had orders from the governor to behead He JingSheng on the spot. So the telegraph came to Shaoyang, over He JingSheng's dead body.
Beheading was just one of many extreme forms of punishment common in those times, and beheadings got even more common when the Qing Dynasty collapsed and China tumbled into a jigsaw of warlords. If they were caught then criminals, illicit lovers, and artists were all bound and led by a rope through the town. Their pale shocked faces were whitewashed with hopeless horror. They lagged behind, trying to draw out their last minutes while the guards went at a trot, in a hurry to get back for a lunch of green chilli flavoured with pork and rice.

When they got outside the city walls along the river, the guards made their captives kneel while they sharpened their swords nearby. After a few kicks and whimpers and begs for mercy the prisoners were made to lean forward, and then they had their heads cut off. Then the guards would take the head and trot back through the narrow streets to their barracks and eat their lunch till their bowls were picked clean.

The purpose of parading the captives through the streets was to educate the people into the clangers of crime, falling in love and of being an artist. But the people were too stupefied with opium to even notice. Opium was freely on sale, and poppies grew everywhere, even in the Temple of the Victorious Scholar.

The Shaoyang people smoked to forget who was their latest warlord, but in buying opium they were indirectly paying for all the troubles they were smoking to forget because opium production was controlled by the warlords, who used the profits to finance incessant war. To make matters worse, after a while the people found that not only had smoking opium helped them forget the troubles with the warlords, but they'd forgotten everything else as well. They were a people without memories, not because the past was too terrible to remember, but because the present was so slow they had no time for anything else.

When they executed the lovers and artists the guards took the severed heads because there was a good trade in heads at the time. Nobody could pass through to the afterlife unless their body was complete so the guards took the heads with them, and sold them to the family, who would pawn all their possessions to bury their complete family member in a befitting way.
The matter of burying a complete body was taken so seriously at the
time that even the eunuchs at the Emperor's Palace in Beijing carried their
severed penises and testicles in clay pots at their waist. There were crazy
medical men who claimed that they had a medicine that could reconnect the
manhood to the man, and so the desperate eunuchs, surrounded by the
Emperors harem (hand picked from all China for the fragrance of their private
parts, the softness of their pubic hair, the pale moon pallor of their skin, their
eyes, and the beauty of their singing) would strap their body parts back onto
their groins and try, so hard, to achieve an orgasm.

Maybe the fact that in Shaoyang the artists were suppressed so cruelly
during those times encouraged the young people to take up brush and ink and
paint secretly in their floating houses and this stayed with the people through
time. The city was so chaotic, and life was so cheap that it inspired mediocre
artists to genius.

Trouble sculpted beauty.

In the photos of Old Shaoyang the old wood and bamboo houses had
a kind of beauty that might have come from the brush of an artist, but had just
happened naturally, like a tree or river bank. The old town was so beautiful
that after the Communist liberation the old city was used as a set for many
propaganda films that were shot in the back streets. Classics like 'The People
Welcome the Nightsoil Collectors' and 'How Happy We Are Under the Great
Helmsman' (not a pornographic film).

But now the bamboo and wooden buildings had been pulled or
knocked down, and concrete prisons erected in their place - blocks of flats with
bars on the windows and piles of rubbish festering against the walls. Old
Shaoyang only existed as the backdrop to awful Communist films, and the
ugliness of the New Shaoyang sapped people of resistance at times.

In the Ming Dynasty a list of twelve natural scenic spots were made for
Shaoyang. Of the famous Twelve Scenic Spots of Shaoyang, now only five
remained.

The ones that still existed were the Shuangqing Park, Lily Flower Pool,
the Evening Sail at Shentang, and the White Cloud Temple.
I had been to the White Cloud Temple with a Sun An. It was early on a Sunday morning and we arrived so early that the salesmen were still setting up their stalls. We walked past them before they realised that we were there, and came round a bend to a cleft in the mountain where there was a forested hillside, a stream, and a Buddhist nunnery of grey tiled roofs that were furred with exotic mosses and lichens.

A crag loomed above us, marked out with stark lines of filigree branches sharp against the skyline, while deep in the shadows there were soft green ferns and a boulder splashing stream. The path up to the temples was lined with trees that stretched out their branches and tapped you on the shoulder with a mossy claw, and held another one out for money. Each tree shook its leaves as you passed by, warning the others further on, who being blind, stretched out their roots and branches in order to trip you up. We fought off the branches and we climbed up worn grey stone steps to the first temple. On the doors were two lines of kaishu calligraphy carved into lengths of maroon wood. Inside the temple was dark, black wood and banners of red inscribed with gold scriptures. Through the beams trailed the smell of sandalwood incense, and at the door a bottomless brass bowl filled with the ashes of pilgrim's dreams.

There was a nun in russet clothes standing at a table in front of a giant statue of Guanyin. Guanyin looked down with blue eyes, full of compassion.

'We can have our fortune told,' Sun An suggested.

'OK,'

'You go first!'

The nun had a sour face as gestured me to kneel. She struck a brass bowl three times, its chimes ringing out in the eaves, and chanted a few rhymes. Then I shook the divining sticks and one fell out. She looked at the number, 22, and from a dusty cupboard she handed me a piece of paper with a snarl of distaste.

The paper was a thin crudely printed strip, with a verse printed in long columns of Chinese characters:

'You have been trying so hard for so many years
Trying to achieve beyond all your fears
Ups and downs you'll have good fortune
Good experiences will all come soon
You are the green pine in front of the rock
Time will bring you only good luck
The future will be OK,
and luck will come to stay!

Yours is good!' Sun An said enviously, and took his turn in front of Guanyin. She smiled down at him as he shook the container of divining sticks, but they all fell out with a loud clatter on the stone floor. The nun’s bad temper slipped down a few notches as she helped Sun An pick them up. He had another go, but again all the sticks fell out. The nun looked at him with contempt, and Sun An was too nervous to go again.

Just shake them hard,' I said. He shook them gently, and tried to flip one out. They all crashed out again. The omens were terrible, and if he could Sun An would have escaped. Future held him to the spot.

The nun showed him how to do it, and at last one single stick dropped onto the stone floor with a relieved tinkle of bamboo on stone.

The nun picked it up, looked at the number and smiled for the first time when she handed him his fortune. It was printed on a sheet like mine, but the letters were in thick black characters scrawled in a rough hand:

No wife, No Money
Will come to you.
No luck, No chance
To help you through.
No children, No nothing
Is what you’ll get,
Unless you pay us
To keep us fat!

Sun An was stricken. I’d never seen someone so affected by such a badly written poem. He held the paper in his shaking hands and his legs lacked the strength to stand up.

I can change your fate,' the nun smiled.
Can you? 'Sun An grasped at the straw.
Yes, the nun smiled.

How much? Sun An asked.

Fifty yuan, she replied.

Sun An took out his wallet. He only had a hundred yuan note. It clung to his wallet in desperation, the nun yanked it free then struck her gong.

Take from this man the curse, he has lifted with his purse! she intoned and struck the gong three more times.

Sun An hesitated, then bowed three times.

Sun An, I nudged him, your change!

He still stared ahead of him.

She owes you fifty yuan!

There were twelve scenic spots listed for Shaoyang.

The poem listed for Shuangqing Pavilion was unique in that it was written by a young revolutionary, who, like so many others ended up as a headless corpse outside the gates of Shaoyang. His head stayed on the gate for three days, and on the third day it started chanting poetry. The same poem over and over till the local warlord had it taken far out over the waves of the South China Seas and buried beneath the waves with the fish for company. The fish heard the chanting from inside the box, and it made them want to sing, and they did, great bubbles, which is how fish sing.

The words of the dead man’s head were such that they could never be forgotten. Anyone who passed by that day had them in their head until the day they died. The bewitched head’s chant was,

The drizzly river disappears in mist,
Rain clouds part as sunset fragments the clouds,
Shoes take a narrow path through the grass
And the breeze carries the sound of dancing.
From the wall I gaze into night’s shadows,
And the sound of one flute conjures up ten thousand memories.

The Shuangqing pavilion perched high up on its crag overlooking the spot where the Shaoshui and Zijiang Rivers met. On the opposite bank a Song Dynasty governor had built the North Pagoda to bring the Shaoyang good
fengshui. The pavilion was a place where artists and poets would meet on moonlit nights, and drink wine and talk.

It was also marked by the couplet:

Clouds carry the music of the bells like a whisper on the wind
The moon pushes the pagoda’s shadow from the opposite bank to me.
It sounded much more beautiful in Chinese because each line was a concentrated feast of only seven syllables.

The more I sneezed in dusty libraries the more poetry I unearthed, laid down by generation upon generation of gentlemen scholars and court officials. Shaoyang’s most famous child, Wei Yuan came to Shuangqing Pavilion and wrote another layer of poetry.

Wei Yuan was the writer of the Haiguo Tuzhi, a hundred volume account of the outside world. His advise of ‘adopt barbarian’s ways to resist the barbarians’ was utterly ignored by the defunct Qing Dynasty, but followed to the letter by the Japanese who took Western technology and not only protected themselves with it, but invaded China and in time shook the Western Empires to core of their pretensions. He came back to Shaoyang for the Ancestor’s Grave Sweeping Holiday, when he was forty six years old, and wrote his famous poem ‘Return to the Zijiang River and Visit Shuangqing Pavilion.’

This poem was now carved in two stone tablets that faced across the river, where, through the claws of trees and the piles of rubbish to see New Shaoyang suffering under its grey gloom of pollution. The dull cityscape lit up with the lightning flashes of welding torches putting it all together.

I stood high on the lonely crag and read:
Where two river meet there is an island
The ripples of the river under waves of mist
I’ve left these waters for so many years
The floods have turned the mountain into a bank
Late spring rains obscure the sky
Look around to the lonely pavilion
The sunset reflects my sadness
Wei Yuan was the first man to open his eyes to the outside world, and saw that in the mechanical tricks of the foreigners was the key to the Middle Kingdom’s salvation. But when he returned to Shaoyang to write this poem he was no longer young, and his advise had been completely ignored by the mandarins.

When I come back again
My hair will be white
But the slopes will still be green.
Remember boating here that first time
A man in the dark fishing stars from the water
Liu planted an orchard of peach trees
Heng saw the willows by the pavilion
Expect the outside world’s shadow
To wake the people who will shine again.

The most immediate poems I found were the ones that talked about places that had gone, that now only existed in lines of poetry written with brushes on rough paper.

Small Shehu Mountain was buried under the weight of suburbs, but in the Ming Dynasty Che Da Yan went there and wrote about it,

Shehu Mountain is more lovely in snow,
The white piles up as the sky clears,
And in the clouds a bright sun congeals,
Enraptured, you wish for Spring’s release,
So you can wave goodbye to She Mountain.

At Dongshan there was a tall mountain that was once crowned with a temple. Hung from a tree in the courtyard was the massive jinglai bell, cast in bronze. The temple was destroyed in 1952, for a reason none of the history books ever said, and even though it had happened so recently, no one knew why or how the bell had disappeared. But in the Ming Dynasty the temple existed, lonely in the clouds of its high mountain.

In the white grip of winter Zhang Tong Chang walked up through the silence and wrote afterwards,
On the peak the ancient temple is quiet in the wind,
Looking out see the village smoke and the river's end.
Incense smoke drifts down through winter trees as the bell strikes,
Then in the hush you hear the sound of petals falling on water.
Raise your cup and the clouds can read your palm,
While the monk leads the way to self cultivation.

Aesthetes and poets have wandered through China for over a thousand years, dreaming and drinking and carving poems into stone. The greatest poets like Li Bai and Du Fu were all great travellers, and poems were so integral to travel that when the poet Sushi tried to visit Lu Mountain without putting brush to paper, a Song Dynasty equivalent of not taking photographs, he struggled for weeks and eventually found it impossible and ended up writing the most famous lines of Chinese travel poetry:

I recall long ago admiring this place
and then roaming in its distant haze
But this time it isn't a dream
this really is Lu Mountain.

I lay back and thumbed through a book of Tang Dynasty poems, wandered through landscapes of limpid water and emerald bamboo, sheer cliffs and fantastic, gibbon haunted falls. It struck me that China is mapped with poetry. If you dig there you do not uncover bones or pottery or foundations of stone, but lines of verse.
‘It is by candlelight one enters Babylon; and all roads lead to Babylon, provided
it is by candlelight one journeys’

Helen Waddell

Lyrics from the Chinese, 1913
Contributor's Notes

Andrew Barker holds a BA in English Literature, an MA in Anglo/Irish Literature and a Ph.D. in American Literature. His poetry has been published in The Asian Literary Review, Fifty, Fifty, and Hong Kong, City Voices. Snowblind from my Protective Colouring, his first book of poetry, was published in 2009 by Chameleon Press, with the villanelle-sequence Everything in Life in Contagious performed at the Fringe Theatre as part of The Hong Kong Literary Festival.

Angela Pang was born in Harbin, Dian grew up in Guangdong and now studies in Lingnan as an exchange student, Angela enjoys experiencing different cultures and eagerly discovering the meaning behinds it. She likes travelling, and one of her wildest dreams is to travelling around the world on her own.

Asato Wong is a third year BACCE student. She is weird and weird is the best adjective to describe her. Not a good English student, but she loves using English to express herself sometimes. She likes blogging and always updating her blog. In her blog, bus is always her topic. She got something similar written when she was Year 1, but sadly she lost the book and she can never read that passage in her life. Again, she is here to thank her best friend Franziska reminding her to write something for the department. Cheers!

Celine / Cai Xinfei I've been majoring in English in Sun Yat-sen University since 2008. In Professor Dai Fan's Creative Writing course, I started to write creative non-fiction in English. It has been an interesting and fulfilling experience and I'm thankful for what Professor Dai and the course have offered—a chance to reexamine what I've experience through writing and shed a new light on it.

Charmaine Li is a year 2 CEE student.

Chen Huiqian/ Phoenix loved drawing and classic music as a girl. I regard writing as another way to observe the world, to rethink of my life and to share
my experiences with others. I enjoy writing and I hope that more and more people will be interested in writing their own stories.

Chen Ying, female, twenty-year-old, sophomore in Sun Yat-Sen University. I’m not qualified enough to be an English Language and Literature major, for I am not a literature buff. But I’m way willing to develop a good relationship with it. Just as I believe: I read, I write and I exist.

Chen Yiting / Jade: Born in 1990, in a small town in north Guangdong. An ordinary college girl with a passionate curiosity. Long to make acquaintances with the world, the society and the beauty of human mind. Hope to be happy, honest, understanding and helpful to others.

Chow Yik Ling is a third year student.

Cindy Qi lived in a small mountainous town in Jiang Xi province, and immigrated to Guangdong province when she was eight. Dealing with different cultures and life styles in the two provinces had broadened my mind and made me a person who is willing to accept new things. I like new things, challenge, excitement, and I live on passion.

Connie Kung is a Year 3 English major who loves language. She is currently learning Spanish and Japanese. She wishes to develop a teaching career in English language and Putonghua. She had never written any English poems before but finally she is determined to write one and it's published in this literary magazine.

CY is a year 3 Visual Art student.

Dai Fan holds a Master's degree in human geography and a PhD degree in linguistics. She teaches English in the Department of English at Sun Yat-sen University. She has published a number of creative nonfiction writings in Chinese. She also published a novel, Butterfly Lovers in English.

Diksha Baniya is from Nepal but has been living in HK for about nine years. I like reading memoirs, autobiographies, especially by asian writers and I
believe there should be more Asian voices in English literature. Someday I hope to write a book about Nepal.

Huey is a third year English major from Malaysia who loves languages a lot! Growing up in a multi-lingual country is definitely the biggest influence. Lingnan gave me chances to learn French, Russian and Spanish; am blessed and grateful to everything I have now!

Justin Hill novels have twice been nominated for the Man Booker Prize. His internationally acclaimed first novel, *The Drink and Dream Teahouse*, won the 2003 Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize and a 2002 Betty Trask Award, and banned by the government in China, and was picked by the Washington Post as one of the Top Novels of 2001. His second novel, *Passing Under Heaven*, won the 2005 Somerset Maugham Award and was shortlisted for the Encore Award.

The first of Justin Hill's Conquest Trilogy, chronically the momentous events that surround the Battle of Hastings, in 1066, will be published in Spring 2011.

Jim Rice was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on February 26, 1956. He was educated at The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where he earned a degree in philosophy and the University of Cambridge, Downing College where he earned MA and LLM degrees. Mr. Rice has taught law at the National University of Malaysia and since 1992 he has worked and lived in Hong Kong. A legal philosopher by training, he has also worked for many years in support of both refugees and migrant workers’ rights. Mr. Rice is currently an Assistant Professor in Philosophy at Lingnan University and lives with his wife Cris in Discovery Bay, Hong Kong.

Kiwi, Chan Lai Kam is a student in English Department. I would like to thank Professor Ding for teaching my fellow students and me to appreciate poems, and encouraging us to submit our works as well. It is the first English poem I have ever written, but I do write few Chinese poems as pastime.
Leung Ping-kwan has published eleven volumes of poems, including bilingual editions such as City at the End of Time (1982), Foodscape (1997), Clothink (1998), Travelling with a Bitter Melon (2002) and the more recent Shifting Borders (2009). He also writes fiction and has published a novel and four collections of stories, among them the collection Islands and Continents was translated into French (Îles et Continents, Gallimard: 2002) and English (HKU Press, 2007). He was awarded The Hong Kong Urban Council’s Biennial Award for Literature in 1991 (Fiction) and 1997 (Poetry). His latest fictional work is Postcolonial Affairs of Food and the Heart. He teaches creative writing, literature and film studies at Lingnan University and has published extensively on urban culture and film studies.

He was writer-in-residence in Berlin in 1998 and has three volumes of poems translated into German: Von Politik und den Früchten des Feldes, Seltsame Geschichten von Vögeln und Blumen, and the latest von Jade an Holz, and one volume into French: De ci de là des choses.

Li Xizhao / Lena. I think I am a very contradictory person. Sometimes I am quiet, pessimistic and sometimes I am active, optimistic and unruly. But whatever I am, one thing is certain: I love my liberty even more than my life.

Mandy Chen aged twenty, is a typical Leo girl. Born in August, Mandy is endowed with an active and outgoing personality. But what creative nonfiction writing brings her is a new way of life: being nostalgic, grateful and thoughtful. She LOVES it!

Mike Ingham has been teaching English Studies as a member of the English Department at Lingnan University since 1999. Mike is a founder member of Theatre Action, a Hong Kong based drama group that specialises in action research on more literary drama texts. He also directs student productions in English at Lingnan University as part of the university’s liberal arts mission. He has recently worked on a study of Hong Kong documentary film and has published critical writing on film, drama and adaptation studies. His current work focuses on intermediality studies between poetry and art song forms. By contrast, his creative writing is still at the embryonic stage!

Qiao Liangyu, born and raised in a small town in central China, I always feel the strong urge to know the bigger world better. Reading and writing have been my major interests. I believe that good stories have the power of recreating the reality and deepening people's understanding of life itself.

Roger Berry is an Associate Professor at Lingnan University. He holds a PhD from Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland, and has published widely on topics ranging from Pedagogic Grammar to riddles in communicative language teaching, as well as a wide range of light verse.

Sofie Yuen is a Year 3 student from the Department of English. Books, music and movies are the backbones of her life; the springhead of her inspiration. Reading Shopaholic series was the first time she actually realized the fun and happiness of reading.

Sun Mengtian / Katlanna: As a baby girl, I have never thought anything about writing until one day, when I was in primary school, Miss Wang, my class teacher came to me and said: "Mengtian, you've got a talent of writing. Here's a book which can help you advance at it. Don't lose it." Miss Wang, I haven't lost it and let you down, have I?

Tai Nga Yan Dian: I enjoy being exposed to different things. I love to be inspired and I am spending my life working to be the one who inspires.

Tan Minling is fond of stamp collecting and literary. She is a big fan of fairy tales and mythologies. She wants to explore William Shakespeare, Jane Austen,
Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence. Recently, she wants to write stories about her friends who are from single families.

**Tong Ka Chun** A Year 2 Contemporary English and Education students. Studying in a joint program by Lingnan and HKIEd, I always experience the feeling of role confusion when I introduce myself to others. Fascinated by the Godard’s movies and Roland Barthes’ books, I think that telling stories is the easiest way to inspire people and it allows the greatest imagination for the readers. My goal is to write stories to reflect the life of typical Hong Kong citizens which can has strike a responsive chord in Hong Kong people’s hearts.

**Tong Ka Chun Tony** is a Year 2 Contemporary English and Education students. Studying in a joint program by Lingnan and HKIEd, I always experience the feeling of role confusion when I introduce myself to others. Fascinated by the Godard’s movies and Roland Barthes’ books, I think that telling stories is the easiest way to inspire people and it allows the greatest imagination for the readers. My goal is to write stories to reflect the life of typical Hong Kong citizens which can has strike a responsive chord in Hong Kong people’s hearts.

**Trista Yeung** is a freshman in Translation faculty. I’m passionate about art, language and musical. I try to read as much as I can. My current favorite authors are Nicholas Sparks, Frank McCourt, George Orwell and Lin Huiyin (林徽因). The smell of books simply fascinates me. But what really captures me is how most of the stories run through my veins with their surrealism and still linger in the air after I have long finished the books.

**Tu Hang** I have a poor memory, so I write stories in order to keep myself remembering those important events happened in my life, and I believe writing is of great significance to me. Broken Heart was written after I was dumped by my first girlfriend which is a heartrending experience to everybody. You would better... Or you will... was about my deal mom, and she is a very "special" woman——I am sure you can find how special she is after reading my story.
Vickie Wu I'm a fun-loving and cheerful person who loves to read and write. Books are my inspirations and nutrients, which is why my bedroom is full of novels, even though a large pile of them are still unread. I had a lot of fun writing this autobiography and hope more people will enjoy reading it.

Wai Wai Leung Vivian I am a year 1 student majoring translation in Lingnan, self-employed in a small fashion business. In my leisure time, I love to write poems, prose, news reflection and film reviews in both Chinese and English. I had a blog to share: http://hk.myblog.yahoo.com/trendy-girl/ Literally, I was a shopaholic on accessories since I became a model but now I am repressing myself hard :P At the same time, I support green environment so I tend barter for them online these days. I have 1 year fashion production, design development and reselling experience from a Canadian fashion firm, and thanks to those experience it shapes today’s me who is passionate about everything. I adore Music and Fashion all around the world.

Xie Le / Shadow Where there is sunshine, there is Shadow. I’m a girl who enjoys sunshine so much. I love blue but I don’t look so blue. In some way I’m an extrovert and optimist.

Yau Chun Fai Joseph At a very young age my parents told me I was different. My IQ score was 95. I took up speaking much later than my sister and brothers. The teacher arranged me to sit at the back of the classroom and never asked me to answer anything. I had conversations with myself to keep me from being lonely. Perhaps I should say, ad astra per alia porci, to the stars on the wings of a pig.

Zhang Hongxuan Emma an MPhil student in the Lingnan English Department. Emma loves to read, but finds writing a bit intimidating. She is mostly interested in fictions set in contemporary China. Her favorite writers are: Ha Jin, Han Shaogong, Yu Hua, Yan Lianke, and Mo Yan. Apart from reading, Emma enjoys watching movies and cooking. She is a mother of two kids – a happy family woman.
About The Pearl Necklace: I wrote the story to help me remember who my brother used to be. The last time I saw or spoke to my brother was about a year ago. He had a medical crisis and felt vulnerable about being single in his forties. Our worlds now are so far apart that I find it difficult to console him. The boy in The Pearl Necklace is long gone.