

黃怡

Wong Yi

/ **International Writing Program (IWP)**

2023 Fall Residency

Hong Kong Writer

小說 / Short Stories

愛荷華大學國際寫作計劃創辦於1967年，其中「秋季駐留計劃」每年邀請世界各地的資深與新晉作家，透過閱讀、寫作與對談，交流創作心得。

「傑出香港作家交流計劃」自2009年起資助香港作家參加秋季駐留計劃，獲選作家均為香港文學界代表人物，他們在駐留期間進行文化交流，寫作，研究，建立網絡，並向外國作家和讀者介紹香港文學的多元面貌與特質。

2009年 - 2023年獲選的傑出作家為：

2009年 董啟章
2010年 韓麗珠
2011年 謝曉虹
2012年 陳智德
2013年 李智良
2014年 鄧小樺
2015年 鄭政恆
2016年 伍淑賢
2017年 劉偉成
2018年 周漢輝
2019年 陳麗娟、陳炳釗
2021年 莊梅岩
2023年 何麗明、黃怡

Founded in 1967, the renowned International Writing Program (IWP) provides a residency that assembles established and emerging writers from around the world for a semester of shared reading, writing and conversation in Iowa City, U.S.A.

Since 2009, the Fellowship for Outstanding Hong Kong Writers has supported the participation of Hong Kong writers in the IWP Fall Residency at the University of Iowa. Writers chosen for the Fellowship represent the best of Hong Kong's literary scene. During the Residency, writers will be engaged in various cultural exchange events. They may also create new works, conduct research, build international connections with peers, and introduce the diverse and distinguishing facets of Hong Kong literature to overseas writers and readers.

Fellowship for Outstanding Hong Kong Writers 2009 – 2023 includes:

2009 Dung Kai-cheung
2010 Hon Lai-chu
2011 Dorothy Tse
2012 Chan Chi-tak
2013 Lee Chi-leung
2014 Tang Siu-wa
2015 Matthew Cheng
2016 Virginia Suk-yin Ng
2017 Stuart Wai-shing Lau
2018 Chow Hon-fai
2019 Chan Lai-kuen, Chan Ping-chiu
2021 Candace Mui-ngam Chong
2023 Tammy Lai-ming Ho, Wong Yi

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作者簡介

/ Biography

黃怡 / WONG Yi

黃怡是香港作家、創意寫作導師，香港大學心理學及比較文學一級榮譽社會科學學士、英國倫敦大學國王學院英語文學碩士，是現任《字花》編輯、香港電台節目《開卷樂》主持，並擔任香港多項文學獎評審。曾任《明報周刊》、《明報·星期日生活》、《字花》等報刊專欄作家，作品曾獲改編成音樂演出、戲劇、電影短片等，並獲本地及外國大學選作教材。

黃怡是香港藝術發展獎2018藝術新秀獎（文學藝術）得主，並曾獲青年文學獎、大學文學獎、中文文學創作獎等小說獎項。2019年獲邀參與新加坡作家節，2020年入選台灣《聯合文學》「二十位最受期待的青壯世代華文小說家」之一。2021年任香港浸會大學首屆「華語作家創作坊」香港駐校作家，2023年任香港教育大學駐校作家。曾參與新加坡書展、台北書展、香港國際文學節等，並於2023年起聯同三名香港小說家及瑞士法語區作家團體AJAR進行「心照」瑞士及香港文學交流創作計劃。

黃怡的作品關注香港的日常生活、歷史、記憶、情感、文化與語言特色，著有小說集《擠迫之城的戀愛方法》（2021）、《林葉的四季》（2019）、《補丁之家》（2015）、《據報有人寫小說》（2010），作品英譯小冊《Lam Yip's Neighborhood》（2019）由水煮魚文化出版（英譯者：Jennifer Feeley 費正華）。黃怡亦致力與不同界別的藝術家合作，包括為香港建築師學會主辦的洛杉磯建築展覽「島與半島」撰寫文學作品參展（2019年於洛杉磯展出，2020年於香港作回應展），為香港藝術節委約及製作之粵語室內歌劇《兩個女子》撰寫文本（2021年5月首次公演，2023年3月以舞蹈歌劇形式重演），及為大館表演藝術季：SPOTLIGHT 的跨媒體音樂演出《幸福家庭與狗》撰寫文本（2021年10月首次公演）。目前她正在書寫一系列以香港古蹟及歷史故事為靈感、探討何為記憶與歷史的短篇小說，以及更多適合用作音樂演出的文學作品。

黃怡 / WONG YI

WONG Yi is a Hong Kong writer, librettist, and editor for the literary journal *Fleurs des lettres*. She graduated from the University of Hong Kong with a Bachelor of Social Sciences in Psychology and Comparative Literature, and holds a Master of Arts in English from King's College London. She has won several literary awards, including the 2018 Hong Kong Arts Development Award for Young Artist (Literary Arts). In 2020, she was named one of the “20 most anticipated young Sinophone novelists” by the Taiwanese literary magazine *Unitas*. She currently teaches creative writing and hosts a reading programme “Book Review” on RTHK Radio 2.

Wong Yi's work pays attention to Hong Kong's everyday life, history, culture, language, memory, and emotions. She is the author of four short story collections – *Ways to Love in a Crowded City* (2021), *The Four Seasons of Lam Yip* (2019), *Patched Up* (2015), and *News Stories* (2010). Her works have been anthologized, and selected stories and essays were translated into English by Jennifer Feeley and published as *Lam Yip's Neighborhood* (Spicy Fish Cultural Production, 2019). She has been a judge at local literary competitions, and a columnist at various local newspapers and magazines, including *Ming Pao Weekly*, *Sunday Ming Pao*, *Fleurs des lettres*, *Linepaper*, *Hong Kong Pupil Literature Monthly Magazine* and *Tai Tau Choi Literature Monthly Magazine*. Her work has been adapted by various artists into music, drama, and mini-movie formats, as well as taught at universities in Hong Kong and overseas.

She has participated in events such as the Singapore Writers Festival, Singapore Book Fair, Hong Kong International Literary Festival, and Taipei International Book Exhibition. She was the Hong Kong Writer-in-residence for Hong Kong Baptist University's first Chinese Writers' Workshop in 2021, and writer-in-residence for Education University of Hong Kong in 2023. Her collaborative work with artists from other disciplines includes participation in the Los Angeles Architecture Exhibition *Island_Peninsula* organised by The Hong Kong Institute of Architects in 2019, writing the libretto for the Cantonese-language chamber opera *Women Like Us* (commissioned and produced by the Hong Kong Arts Festival, premiered in May 2021, and adapted into a dance opera in March 2023), and writing an original text for the multimedia concert *The Happy Family* (part of Tai Kwun's “SPOTLIGHT: A Season of Performing Arts”, premiered in October 2021). In 2023, she joined three other Hong Kong novelists and Swiss-French writers' collective AJAR in “The Shining Heart” project, a literary exchange between Hong Kong and Switzerland. Her other current projects include a series of short stories exploring Hong Kong's historical monuments and the meaning of memory, and texts for performance with music and other art forms.

小説

/ Short stories

擠迫之城的戀愛方法

/ Ways to Love in a Crowded City

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

WHEN：東方之珠輪椅

Robert 覺得即使坐輪椅過紅隧都比坐巴士快。在這城內每天塞兩次車的上班族們都如霍金般隨身攜帶各種大小的螢光幕，好讓自己身處的車龍以比輪椅更慢的龜速蠕動時能和密實如密實盒的車廂外的世界有那麼一點點的接觸；而今早上巴士才發現忘了帶手機的 Robert 被卡在紅隧口、身旁的 OL 正在車上用眼線筆和假睫毛開眼，對面的肥婆把免費報紙舉在他面前一呎外，Robert 想，這實在是比一般的塞車更像那個霍金還是愛因斯坦還是莎士比亞所說的度日如年。

Emily 把附有 LED 燈的化妝鏡舉至眼前，用 RoadShow 廣告正在推銷的眼線筆把臉上的兩道細縫畫成如埃及壁畫人像般的鮮明大眼。她聽說日本太太因為能在丈夫起床前完成畫皮而聞名於世，而在我城坐辦公椅的光鮮美艷的女子，則有在各自的巴士座椅上整理儀容讓自己由裸體變得體的超能力。反正在早上的 rush hour 即使不遙遠的車程都總漫長，而誰都不想放棄太多賴床的時間；她知道哪裡一定會塞車、讓她有時間打開一瓶又一瓶的液體消毒雙手戴大眼 con，在哪些路段有足夠的光線讓她修眉和剃鬚子，而什麼時候會顛簸得無法用噴霧式 dry shampoo 洗頭。這也是我城比日本厲害的地方：連日本都還未發明真正的多啦A夢，我們的 OL 早就知道如何把所有化妝品收納在優雅而矜貴的半月形手袋裡。

每次在下班的車上看見一個身穿美容師制服的女子把半月形小手袋放在身邊的位子上，她就知道她將在這比密實盒更密實的巴士車廂困住超過九十分鐘。Emily 知道那是在某幾班塞車特別嚴重的巴士上提供 gel 甲服務的女子，在那些傍晚她見過美甲師從那小手袋裡取出三十幾種不同顏色的指甲油給同車 OL 的指甲上色鑲鑽，在塞一程車的期間賺到的工資居然是 Emily 時薪的四倍：

「如果我在每天下班塞車時練習修甲，或許我也能在巴士上秘撈吧？」在這個照常塞車的早上，Emily 邊用在公司聖誕抽獎裡抽到的便攜式電動牙刷刷牙邊想。

在這繁忙的城內節省時間與賺錢於誰都是無比重要的，所以 Joseph 在星期一至五隨便某個塞車的早上上 YouTube 聽些如藝人般的著名牧師講道，那些本來規定得上教堂的星期日早上就能用來幫中學生補習賺錢、而死後仍能上天堂。Joseph 總愛把時間如俄羅斯方塊般移動堆疊，比如用上班的時間打電話安排秘撈、把早餐和午餐一次過吃掉，以及用 Instagram 發佈食物圖片代替飯前禱告：他信仰全能的上主並追求只比神無能一點的萬能錢財，在這兩方面他可是個虔誠地依信仰而活的好教徒。

於是他開始在巴士上向經常同車的中學生提供補習服務：反正大家每天都得困在同一輛比颱風移動更緩慢的車上，倒不如好好利用這樣的時間超前其他同學吧，Joseph 如此對那些跨區上學的名校生說。他深信他對時間如此珍視的性格來自遺傳：Joseph 的士司機父親也是個信仰省時勤勞的男子，於是 Joseph 自小便熟習各種不必離開座位也能整潔地大小便的秘技。雖然大學畢業的 Joseph 不必在辦公椅上使用這些秘技（反正他會在辦公時間上廁所的同時用手機炒股票），但在不得不留在某個座位上時爭取時間賺錢這一點他倒是一直堅守。他聽說當年他父親用那輛喜慶的大紅的士載母親去大會堂註冊時還順便載了個客人過海，那的確有點過份；到了這個浪漫必先不切實際的年代，Joseph 也只不過是打算把女友的生日和拍拖紀念日和情人節都在反正都得放假的聖誕節長假期一次過慶祝罷了，至少那時候，他會專心。

Mary 聽說以前的水手會在每個停靠的港口養一個情人，方便在終於能和異性相處的日子裡隨時都有油潤的雙臂可抱。而不貪心的她也只不過是在上下班的巴士上各約會一位情人，到終於能回到

不會移動的地面時則走向第三名男友的家吧。大概沒有什麼比在巴士上和情人幽會更安全的了。早晚的 rush hour 是城內每個人都不得被困在各自的 traffic jam 裡的兩個時段，誰都無法分身去窺視別人的不忠貞；而且車內的乘客往往把頭頸如向日葵般固定在朝向某個發光螢幕的角度，即使他們都在場，也不會看見什麼。

而 Mary 和那跟她同名但比她有名的貞女瑪利亞一樣，實在不是會和多於一名男子上床的女子。正被卡在紅隧口的她把頭枕在男伴的肩上，細白的手指和厚實的大手交織，她想起的並非這具溫暖身軀的名字或聲音，而是那和她同居的男友的睡臉：她知道她對男友的愛足以容許他以疼痛和嬰兒貫穿她的身體，可是她始終眷戀這種在車上無聲地和溫柔男子並肩的親密，漫長、安靜、不為什麼，比在睡房裡纏綿明亮，比特地外遊輕易，但始終無法和在城的另一端上班的男友分享。她特意送給三位情人一樣的香水：她只要閉上眼，就無法認出陪她上下班每天塞三小時車的，並非那個在家裡累得無法坐直的、但偷偷買了鑽戒準備求婚的溫柔男人。

Joanne 把看完的免費報紙摺起來塞在座椅的旁邊，然後取出手袋裡的打字機。經過上次的慘劇後她決定了不再在車上畫水彩畫：某個忽然修路的路段上閃出一輛單車讓司機急剎車，她的洗筆水和別的乘客的爆谷和汽水和碎粉和湯麵一起便自車廂各處爆發四濺。雖然 Joanne 懂得在車上化妝而化妝也不過是畫畫的一種，可是她還是覺得把那工具太多的藝術形式留在家裡比較好。

於是她選擇在巴士上寫詩。她明白寫詩的環境和工具對語言的質感非常重要，使用電腦或手機或筆甚至墨水筆和原子筆都有分別，在找到最適合她的打字機時她幾乎哭了，在等淘寶把她的寶貝運到這城以前，她曾經三次想拿回鄉證跑過邊境去把它接

來——她記得當年接到大學哲學系的入學取錄時她曾經如此雀躍過，但這樣的激動在她成為銀行的小職員後已經不曾遇過。數字無法如文字般讓她呼吸加速正如男人的手總不如女人的體貼入微，她在獨居的唐樓劏房裡撫摸著打字機嘆息如灼熱的呻吟，如契合的比喻貼切的動詞。有了它以後即使紅隧口塞車塞至日落她也不會在意：圓圓的指頭在利落的按鈕上堅定的壓動，從此她再聽不見車上的八卦或 RoadShow 的低能節目，她聽見的，只有那些流利的、借異國的語言轉世的，詩。

對面的肥婆居然用放在膝上的打字機打了三頁紙，而巴士還是不曾挪動。Robert 實在無法再忍受這城的塞車了。他決定一回到家就買那個 US\$7.99 的三個月學會商業英語的 app，好讓自己可以去外國打工，比如美國或英國，就能徹底擺脫這像他那長期便秘的屁股的隧道口。他聽說英國的長途巴士上都有廁所，至少他每天塞車那兩三小時可以在車上大便或便秘：那樣的願景實在比他現在的處境好太多了。在外國塞車比卡在紅隧口愉快太多了。在這個如常地塞車的早上，忘了帶手機的 Robert 找到了他的夢想。

WHERE：寸金尺土愛巢

所以租下他們家的戀人們，正在做什麼呢，阿明輕輕的說。他挪動環住阿娟肩頭的右臂，邊用鼻子磨蹭阿娟的頸脖邊把右手探進蓋住他們腰下的被子：妳猜她們會這樣、和這樣嗎，阿娟在他耳邊朗朗地笑著，像故意推倒了半袋肉乾的幼犬。可是這並不是阿明與阿娟的雙人床，這是 IKEA 的陳列室——於是阿明的手又爬回阿娟的肩上，像是自知只是寵物的小狗，明白自己總得坐好才能得到餵飼。

阿明和阿娟共同購買的四百呎（實用面積二百七）小房子還有廿四年才供完，去年阿娟發現阿明和她每天塞完車上完班吃完飯看

完戲逛完街才只在這昂貴的愛巢待八小時，另外三分二的時間不就要他倆白白供款十六年？於是在他們往日本慶祝結婚週年時阿娟試著把空出幾天的房子租給她的舊同學、換到了兩餐在異地的晚餐花費。阿明知道阿娟的舊同學那幾天和她的女朋友一起在房子裡看電影、做飯、做他不知道沒有男人能怎樣做的事；可是既然他喜歡讓房子賺錢供自己、阿娟也不介意她們用房子的方法，阿明和阿娟便把房子自早上八時到晚上十時租給這對會擁吻的女子，然後在不眠的商場裡纏綿至夜深。

（親愛的，妳知道嗎，妳是第一個讓我想到來的人，我們的，共同的未來。妳讓我想到來在我們頭上蓋起一座堅實的房子，把黑色暴雨、疫病和八婆們都擋在外面，我們可以養一隻常常心情不好的長毛貓，在彼此的臂裡慵懶地睡到週末午後，然後一起煮些或美麗或扭曲的水煮蛋。旅行時妳總愛挑在海邊有窗的民宿，夜裡月光映在妳眼裡時美得讓我要對妳起誓讓我們擁有只屬於我們的房間，可是我們終將要回去的那座城就算收下我們預支的三十年廉價勞力，也換不來能讓我們安居的房子：我的愛情、許諾，以及我的神明，在樓價面前都完全無能。）

而這城裡的商場都如此的開闊明亮，彷彿電視劇裡那些放得下三張沙發讓角色和角色的戀人和角色的母親和角色的朋友坐在一起吃糖水的客廳。阿明本來也不習慣把自己的愛巢租給外人，畢竟房子屬於自己的證據就是自己能隨時進出；可是當他想到自己那連沙發都放不下的客廳正在賺取租金而他正在 IKEA 免費使用超過三十張不同的沙發，阿明就不再覺得把城市當作自家客廳有什麼反智之處。他甚至懷疑為什麼其他住在這城的人不像他和阿娟般懂得善用空間，不必供款交租交水電煤差餉地租的空間：只要把自己的房子當作一所四百呎（實用面積二百七）的睡房連浴室，整座城市就是一間附帶郊野公園、戲院和快餐店的巨大客廳。

（只要無法負擔一所獨居的處所、以及每件巨大或微小的傢具及開銷，我們在各自的家裡和家人的距離就不比和別的巴士乘客遠。我甚至無法把妳帶回家裡——在這年頭，當行街睇戲食飯的場所都開闊明亮、而我的房間甚至不比 Pacific Place 的廁格開揚，誰又能把戀愛對象以外的人帶到如此不得體的家裡？妳知道我的家人偷偷幫我存了嫁妝、並以為我在中學以後已經「重回」喜歡男性的「正軌」，而當深夜的巴士開往妳和妳家人的房子，我多渴望我也能隨妳上樓抱著妳入睡、讓妳的家人終於明白妳為何從來沒有男友。我知道妳在難眠的晚上孤獨得偷偷流淚的聲音，在每程送妳回家的顛簸車程裡我也得忍住不哭——到底這城的哪個角落才能容納並不驕傲亦不富有的我們？）

這樣的想法實在是沒有任何問題的：他們有填滿城市的商場裡填滿商場的餐廳供應食物，也有乾淨而免費的商場廁所可以使用。到處的 Starbucks 都有免費電源、每人的手機裡都有流動數據，整座互聯網上的玩意便在阿娟的手袋裡隨身攜帶。如果阿娟想和他一起躺著摟抱，他們可以去 IKEA、遊巴士河、佔領書店裡面的地板與長凳，只要不做會讓路人錄影放上高登的事，並沒有人會干涉他和阿娟拍拖的方法，一如只要那對租下他們愛巢的女子會讓他們聯名戶口每個月增加四千元，他也不會干涉她們的愛慾情事。

（我們甚至沒有辦法像別的戀人般在巴士上依偎擁吻：太多的戀人，同性或異性，都因為在公眾場合表現得太親昵而被滿城的網民批判。除了被堅實的四壁圍起來的房子以外，我們又能在哪裡讓隱藏的愛情如幼貓般自由跑跳？我知道妳的薪金必須用以供奉那座被妳家人稱為「家」的房子，而我的自由業從來沒有可以長久信賴的收入，租不起獨居的房間也無法候得公屋。當這城的房子貴得讓我們無法長久遠離家人獨居，要躲到哪裡，才能讓妳靜靜的躺著讓我像暖毯般覆蓋在妳身上，溫柔並堅定地重複我對妳

的癡迷和愛慾當我們各自的家人在我們細小的家裡等著和我們討論結婚生子的話題、而街上的目光刺人？)

所以，妳覺得她們會這樣，或是這樣嗎，阿明的手又在 IKEA 的被子下遊走起來。阿娟有點心不在焉地說她在網上看見別人也開始像他們般把房子短暫外借、讓情侶或援交少女當作偷情的空間；所以呢我們一定要把我的舊同學留下來，不然她們改租別人的房子我們就收不到房租了喔，阿娟撫著阿明的臉頰說。阿明笑著親了她的手心一下，說，你話點就點好啦，老婆豬。

(我愛妳。我愛妳。我從來未試過如此的渴慕一個人，我甚至不知道自己可以陷入如此深重的迷戀——而就只有妳，讓我無法走遠，彷彿妳把我的心打了個洞用艦繩穿著，除了妳以外，並無讓我靜止的定點，在這狹窄擠擁得幾乎容不下愛情的城裡。所以請妳不必再懷疑或感到不安：阿娟會免費把房子借給我們用，完全與我和她以前的戀情無關。)

WHO：購物天堂戀人

一開始是煙味。不帶薄荷的，直徑不適合幼小手指和指甲油的，濃烈如精液的醇萬 (1)。隨著第一泡煙自妳唇間升起和妳一起在公司樓下抽煙的女人們掐熄了話題。妳知道她們在等什麼。妳把那樣的期待和不熟悉的煙一起吞入然後吐出：「我男友沒時間把他在這裡買的煙抽完。」妳幾乎可以聽見妳的話在女人們的腦裡燃起了更多的好奇，可是妳不打算填充它們。妳決定讓它們繼續滋長，以沉默，及適當的養份。

例如這份：「嗯。這果然還是在英國才比較能下嚥。」然後妳隨手把煙丟在地上踏扁，再點起自己慣常的幼身薄荷煙 (2)，輕蔑在嘴角順流成絲。

【「一包醇萬一包薄卡，俾八達通。」上星期在7-11，妳說。】

妳知道妳可以開始在睡眠不足的日子對同事抱怨妳和戀人之間的時差太大——時差實在是個無法控制只能諒解的 little arsehole，啊，妳也可以開始把一些英國口音的單字如「darling」和「cuppa」和「wanker」取代那些充斥辦公室的美國口音「like seriously」和「oh my god」和「bitch」。妳在茶水間泡過的各種 Twinings 茶包 (3) 取代了其他女人們喜歡的燒脂咖啡 (4)，妳知道她們對妳的興趣只停留於妳有沒有變肥和妳的男朋友有沒有錢，這麼兩項。對此妳可以輕鬆的咬著每個英國人都愛吃的香橙口味朱古力 Jaffa cakes (5) 說：「我這種身型在那邊其實太瘦。」

【「收唔收 EPS？」那天放工後在 Marks & Spencer，妳說。】

改變飲食習慣或許是戀愛對於女子的其中一種影響，上一任男友在妳大學畢業後不久就和妳分手，可是妳仍記得他帶過妳去的那些蘇豪餐廳 (6)、九龍城食店 (7) 和大學附近的糖水舖 (8)，分手以後妳常常獨自回到那間糖水舖 order 你們吃過的那些 tiramisu 和楊枝甘露，妳知道老闆以為妳男友死了並化成只有妳看得到的靈體，妳把各吃完一半的甜品放在對面的座位上對老闆咧嘴而笑，妳知道其實妳只是不想承認自己再次單身而糖水舖不久後執笠並非與妳無關。這次呢，妳倒沒有玩看不見的戀人這種把戲，雖然妳那身在英國的遠距離戀人的確無法被這城的人旁觀：妳對邀妳一起午飯的女同事說「I'm terribly sorry，不過我男友是 vegetarian，他不喜歡我吃肉」，然後捧著那盤 spinach and ricotta ravioli (9) 以最美的構圖自拍。

【「table for one please。」在那間妳終將在三天後介紹給同事的 vegetarian restaurant 裡，妳說。】

妳知道那些女人們都很想探問妳那未曾讓大家見過面的英國紳士，有幾個起哄說想看照片想知道他的身世，妳總是笑著說要得到他同意才可以把相片公開，這是妳在他的朋友間學到的禮貌：英國人不像這城的戀人或女子般喜歡自拍，而且比起迷人的外表他更喜歡妳的性格，比起透過鏡頭他更喜歡直接用視網膜看妳，他總是這樣說。所以妳最終會嫁過去嗎，她們說。妳的笑容被他所喜愛的鮮紅色唇膏（10）鑲起：如果他終於求婚成功的話吧，嘿嘿。她們問起妳左手上戴著的戒指（11），那樣復古的歐洲款式不像是這城的現代商品：妳抿了抿唇，說，他說這不是很貴可是不相信。

【「平啲得唔得？」在那個文藝少女與獨特首飾聚集的跳蚤市場裡，妳說。】

在別人看不見的地方也有他留下的證據。有時候妳會穿那件深藍色的男裝襯衣（12）入睡，在那些寂寞而寒冷的冬夜裡；有時候房間的角落裡會有落單的男裝襪子（13），妳會想起它們被肢體填滿的模樣，然後妳會在獨居的房間裡傻笑。小浴室裡除了妳常用的牙刷以外還有一枝大號刷頭的敏感牙齒用牙刷（14），於是每晚臨睡前妳都會想起那個誰都不曾見過的戀人。愛情是一種如此虛無的情感，幻化自並不更加具體的靈魂但幸好能寄生在肉身，以及被各種物理上實在得能被標上價錢作實際交易的物件，如香檳（15）、熊啤啤（16）和他自英國帶來的 Burt's Bees 潤唇膏（17）。

【「潤唇膏係咪買兩枝有九折？」將近收舖時分在屋企樓下的萬寧裡，妳說。】

而更明確的就是，那在情人節把所有被愛的女子都標記出來的花束。速遞員穿過整個辦公室把大束紅玫瑰連同朱古力（18）送到

妳面前時，妳知道這束花甚至比妳的女上司自老公處收到的更大束——可是妳的戀人是外國人嘛，外國人自體型至性格都總是如此的浮誇，當女人們像蜜蜂群般圍著花束哄妳把卡片上的訊息讀出，妳以自YouTube上的英國綜藝節目裡學到的 British accent 把妳自網上搜尋來的英文情話唸出：「I encounter millions of bodies in my life; of these millions, I may desire some hundreds; but of these hundreds, I love only one.」妳知道這是《戀人絮語》（19）裡的節錄，但不看書的女人們都以為妳的男朋友是情聖：不要緊，只有妳知道，她們已經在妳身邊的物件裡，見過這虛擬男友的一切肉身。

【shop list：（1&2）7-11（3）百佳（4）stylist's own（5）Marks & Spencer（6）The Flying Pan（7）清真牛肉館（8）森記糖水（9）VEGETARIAN（10）Bobbi Brown（11）stylist's own（12）Fred Perry（13）GAP（14）stylist's own（15）stylist's own（16）stylist's own（17）stylist's own（18）stylist's own（19）stylist's own】

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本文獲2014年中文文學創作獎小說第二名；香港文學評論學會曾以此小說為文學短片《我城1314》的拍攝靈感素材，2021年4月30日於香港首映。

擠迫之城的戀愛方法

/ Ways to Love in a Crowded City

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

WHEN: WHEELED CHAIRS OF THE PEARL OF THE ORIENT

Robert thinks that even rolling a wheelchair through the Cross-Harbour Tunnel would be faster than riding the bus. The city's commuters who cram into buses twice a day carry around fluorescent screens of all sizes like Stephen Hawking, so that when they're stuck in a traffic jam creeping along at a tortoise speed even more slowly than wheelchairs, they can have a little contact with the world outside the compartments that are as compact as compact storage containers. Robert, who only realized he'd forgotten his cell phone while catching the bus this morning, is stuck in the mouth of the Cross-Harbour Tunnel. The office lady beside him on the bus opens up her eyes with eyeliner and false lashes. The pudgy woman opposite him holds up a free newspaper a foot away from his face. Robert muses that this is actually more like the dragging of time noted by Hawking or Einstein or Shakespeare than the typical traffic jam.

Emily positions the LED makeup mirror in front of her eyes, using the eyeliner that the RoadShow ad is currently promoting on the bus's LCD screen to paint the narrow openings on either side of her face so that they resemble the big, bright eyes

of people on Egyptian wall frescoes. She's heard that Japanese wives are renowned for their abilities to finish painting their faces before their husbands roll out of bed, whereas the glamorous beauties sitting in office chairs in our city are endowed with the superpower to primp and preen in their bus seats, transforming from bare-faced to all dolled up. In any case, even though there isn't far to go, morning rush hour is never-ending, and no one wants to sacrifice too much sleep. She knows where traffic is sure to come to a standstill, which gives her time to open bottle after bottle of liquid to sanitize her hands and insert circle lenses to enlarge her eyes; which stretch of road has enough light to tweeze her eyebrows and shave the hair above her lip; and when it will be too bumpy to spray dry shampoo. In this aspect, our city is more impressive than Japan: even Japan has yet to invent a real-life Doraemon, while our office ladies have long known how to store all of their cosmetics in elegant crescent-shaped luxury handbags.

Whenever she sees a woman in a beautician's uniform set down a small crescent-shaped handbag on the seat next to her during the commute home, she knows that for the next ninety-plus minutes, she'll be trapped in a bus compartment that is more compact than a compact storage container. Emily is aware that this woman offers gel manicures on buses that end up clogged in heavy gridlock. On such evenings, she sees the manicurist fish out thirty different colors of nail polish from that small handbag to paint the nails of the office ladies on the bus—during a traffic jam, she earns four times as much as Emily makes in one hour. "If I practice giving manicures on the ride home each night, maybe I can also make a little extra money on the side?" Emily thinks to herself during

this routine morning traffic jam while brushing her teeth with a portable electric toothbrush won from her company's Christmas raffle.

In this bustling city, saving time and making money are of utmost importance to everyone, so while stuck in weekday morning traffic jams, Joseph goes on YouTube and listens to sermons by famous preachers who seem more like showmen. Those Sunday mornings that are supposed to be spent attending church can thus be used to tutor secondary-school students for money, and he can still get into Heaven after he dies. Joseph is fond of rearranging and stacking time like Tetris blocks; for example, during working hours, he makes a few calls to schedule his side hustles, and he eats breakfast and lunch in one sitting, posting food pictures on Instagram instead of praying before meals—he believes in an almighty God and seeks all-powerful riches that are slightly less powerful than God. In these two aspects, he is a devout believer who lives by his faith.

Consequently, he's begun offering tutoring services to secondary-school students who frequently ride his bus. Anyway, day after day, they're all trapped on the same bus that inches forward more slowly than a typhoon—might as well make use of the time to get ahead of the rest of the class, Joseph tells the students who attend prestigious schools outside of their own districts. He's convinced that this inclination to cherish time is hereditary: Joseph's taxi-driver father is likewise a man who believes in saving time and working hard, and so since childhood, Joseph has picked up all sorts of secret tricks to neatly urinate and

defecate without ever having to leave his seat. Joseph, a university graduate, doesn't need to use these secret tricks while sitting in his office chair (in any case, he trades stocks on his cell phone while using the bathroom during office hours), but whenever he has no choice but to stay put, he insists on carving out time to make a little extra money. Rumor has it that when his father drove his mother to city hall in a festive red taxi to register their marriage, he'd picked up a passenger along the way to take across the water, which was a bit much. In this age of unrealistic romance, Joseph plans to celebrate his girlfriend's birthday, their anniversary, and Valentine's Day all at once over the long Christmas holiday that he's required to take anyway—at least then, he'll be able to give it his undivided attention.

Mary's heard that sailors used to keep a lover at every port of call, so that when they finally chanced to come into contact with the opposite sex, they always had a pair of soft, buttery arms to hold at any given time. Not that greedy, she only has one lover on each bus to and from work, and when she can at long last return to ground that doesn't move, she heads to the home of her third boyfriend. Presumably, there is nothing safer than a secret rendezvous with a lover on a bus. Morning and evening rush hours are the two times when everyone in the city must resign themselves to being trapped in their own traffic jams—no one can spy on anyone else's infidelities; what's more, bus passengers have a habit of angling their necks like sunflowers toward glowing screens, so even if all parties are present, they won't be able to see anything anyhow.

But Mary, like her more famous Virgin namesake, is not actually a woman who will go to bed with more than one man. Stuck in the mouth of the Cross-Harbour Tunnel, she rests her head on the shoulder of her male companion, her pale, slender fingers interlaced with big, thick hands. What she thinks of isn't the name or voice of this warm body, but the sleeping face of the man with whom she lives. She knows that she loves her boyfriend enough to allow him to penetrate her body with pain and babies, yet she is sentimentally attached to the intimacy of silently sitting shoulder-to-shoulder on the bus with a kind and gentle man for a long period of time, finding it serene, for no clear reason: it's brighter than nighttime bedroom lounging, easier than planning a special getaway, but there's no way for her to share this intimacy with her boyfriend, who works at the opposite end of the city. She intentionally gives her three lovers the same cologne—as long as she closes her eyes, she can't tell that the ones who commute with her for three hours each day are not the kind and gentle man at home who's too tired to sit up straight but has secretly bought a diamond ring to propose.

Joanne folds up the free newspaper she's finished reading and stuffs it next to the seat, then pulls out a typewriter from her handbag. After the last tragedy, she's decided not to paint watercolors on the bus anymore. On a stretch of road unexpectedly undergoing construction, a bicycle had darted out of nowhere, causing the driver to slam on the brakes; her brush cleaner, along with other passengers' popcorn, sodas, loose powder, and noodle soup, splashed all over the bus. Although Joanne knows how to apply makeup in a moving vehicle, and that makeup is simply a

kind of painting, she still thinks it's better to leave art forms that entail too many tools back at home.

As a result, she chooses to write poetry on the bus. She understands that the environment and tools for writing poetry are extremely important to the texture of the language. There's a difference between using a computer or cell phone or pen, or even between an ink pen and ballpoint pen. When she found the perfect typewriter, she nearly cried. Before Taobao delivered her treasure to the city, on three different occasions, she considered running across the border with her Home Return Permit to pick it up—she remembers how she jumped for joy when she was accepted into the university's philosophy department, but she hasn't experienced such excitement since becoming a bank clerk. Numbers can't make her breathing speed up the way words can, just as a man's hand is never as considerate as a woman's. In the subdivided flat in the tong lau tenement building where she lives alone, she strokes the typewriter, her sighs like scorching hot moans, like apt metaphors and felicitous verbs. Now that it's in her possession, she doesn't care if the Cross-Harbour Tunnel is jammed until sunset. Her round fingers firmly press down on the nimble keys. She no longer has to listen to the chatter of gossip on the bus or the idiotic RoadShow programs; all she hears are fluent poems reincarnated in foreign languages.

To his surprise, the pudgy woman across from him types three pages on a typewriter perched on her lap, but the bus still hasn't budged. Robert's fed up with the city's traffic jams. He resolves that when he gets home, he's going to buy that app that

costs US\$7.99 and learn business English in three months so that he can snag a job in a foreign country, such as the United States or United Kingdom, and then he'll be able to completely break free from the tunnel that resembles his perpetually plugged-up ass. He's heard that long-distance buses in Britain are equipped with bathrooms, and so he can shit or be constipated on the bus for at least two or three hours a day while trapped in traffic—that vision is far better than his current situation. Traffic jams in foreign countries are much more pleasant than being stuck in the Cross-Harbour Tunnel. On the morning of this commonplace traffic jam, Robert, who's forgotten his cell phone, finds his dream.

WHERE: WORTH-ITS-SPACE-IN-GOLD LOVE NEST

So, what do you think the lovebirds renting our flat are doing right now? Ah Ming coos. He moves his right arm that's wrapped around Ah Kuen's shoulder, nuzzling her neck as he slips his right hand beneath the quilt covering their lower bodies. Do you think they're doing this, and this? Ah Kuen giggles loudly in his ear, like a puppy who's deliberately knocked over half a bag of jerky. But this isn't their double bed—it's an IKEA showroom—and so Ah Ming's hand climbs back up Ah Kuen's shoulder, a puppy who knows that he's merely a pet, understanding that he must sit still in order to receive his treat.

Ah Ming and Ah Kuen jointly purchased a small 400-square-foot (270 of which is usable) flat that will take twenty-four years to pay off. Last year, Ah Kuen realized that between being stuck in traffic jams, working, dining out, going to the theatre, and shopping, she and Ah Ming were only spending eight

hours a day in this high-priced love nest—did they want to waste sixteen years paying for the other two-thirds? And so, when they traveled to Japan to celebrate their wedding anniversary, Ah Kuen rented out their vacant flat to her former classmate as a trial run for the few days that they were gone, which covered the cost of two meals in a foreign country. Ah Ming is aware that during these few days, Ah Kuen's former classmate and her girlfriend stayed in the flat watching movies, cooking, and doing things that he didn't know could be done without a man; but since he likes making money off his flat, and Ah Kuen doesn't mind how the women use the space, Ah Ming and Ah Kuen rent out their home to this canoodling couple from eight a.m. till ten p.m., lingering in sleepless malls until late at night.

(My dear, do you know, you're the first one to make me think of the future, our shared future? You make me dream of putting a solid roof over our heads, keeping out dark storms, contagious diseases, and busy-bodied women. We can raise a grumpy long-haired cat, on weekends lazing in each other's arms until afternoon, and then poach eggs that turn out either beautiful or deformed. When traveling, you always choose a guesthouse with windows overlooking the sea. When the moonlight shines in your eyes at night, it's so exquisite that it makes me want to swear to you that one day, we'll have a room that belongs only to us, but the city to which we'll eventually return will take thirty years' worth of our cheap labor as a down payment without yielding a place where we can settle down free from worries. My love, promises, and God are completely powerless in the face of property prices.)

And the malls in the city are all so open and well-lit,

reminiscent of living rooms in TV shows where there are three sofas for the characters and the characters' lovers and the characters' mothers and the characters' friends to sit together and eat tong sui dessert soup. At first, Ah Ming had trouble getting used to renting his love nest to outsiders—after all, being able to come and go as he pleases is proof that the flat belongs to him; but upon reflecting that his living room, which can't even fit a sofa, is earning rent, and that he has free access to more than thirty different sofas at IKEA, Ah Ming no longer feels that there is anything anti-intellectual about treating the city as his own living room. He even wonders why other city residents aren't as adept at making use of space as he and Ah Kuen are, a space where they don't have to pay a monthly mortgage, rent, utilities, property taxes, or government rent. He simply thinks of their flat as a 400-square-foot (270 of which is usable) bedroom with an adjoining bathroom, and the entire city as a gigantic living room with country parks, theatres, and fast-food restaurants.

(As long as we have no way to afford a place of our own, or any furnishings—whether large or small—and other expenses, we are no farther away from our family homes and our family members than we are from other bus passengers. I can't even bring you back home; these days, when places to go shopping, watch movies, and out to eat are all open and bright, while my room isn't even as spacious as a bathroom stall in Pacific Place Mall, who can bring anyone other than a romantic prospect to such an unseemly home? You know, my family saved a dowry for me on the sly, and after secondary school, they assumed I was “back on the right track” of liking men, but when the late-night bus heads toward the

flat you share with your family, how I long to be able to accompany you upstairs and hold you as you fall asleep, so that your family will finally understand why you've never had a boyfriend. I know the sound of you secretly weeping from loneliness on nights you lie awake tossing and turning, and each time I send you home, I have to fight back tears on the bumpy ride—which corner of the city can accommodate those of us who are neither proud nor rich?)

There's really nothing wrong with this way of thinking. The malls that cram the city are crammed with restaurants serving food, and there are clean and free public restrooms for them to use. Starbucks locations everywhere provide free electrical outlets, and each person's cell phone has mobile data—Ah Kuen carries around the entire World Wide Web in her handbag. If Ah Kuen wants to lie down with him and cuddle, they can go to IKEA, ride around on the bus, or occupy the floors and benches inside the bookstores. As long as they don't do anything that will prompt passersby to post videos online to the Hong Kong Golden Forum, no one will interfere in the way that he and Ah Kuen go out on dates. Likewise, as long as the women who rent their love nest keep increasing their joint bank account by HK\$4000 every month, he won't interfere in their love affair.

(We can't even snuggle and kiss on the bus like other couples. As it is, too many couples, whether gay or straight, are criticized by netizens all over the city for being too intimate in public. Except in a flat surrounded by four solid walls, where can we let our undercover love run and leap as freely as a kitten? I know that your paycheck must be sacrificed for the flat your family

calls “home,” and my freelance business has never been a long-term reliable source of income. I can’t afford to rent my own place, and there’s no way to be assigned public housing regardless of how long I remain on the waitlist. When housing costs in this city are so sky-high that we can’t afford to live away from our families for any length of time, where can we hide so that you can lie back quietly and let me cover your body like a warm blanket, gently and firmly repeating how crazy I am about you and how much I want you, while our respective families wait in our tiny homes to lecture us about getting married and having kids, and people on the streets shoot piercing stares?)

So, do you think they’re doing this, or this? Ah Ming’s hand wanders down the IKEA quilt again. Ah Kuen absent-mindedly mentions she saw online that others have caught on to the trend of renting out their homes for short periods of time just as they’ve been doing, giving space to sweethearts or sugar babies to carry out clandestine love affairs. So, we must make sure we don’t lose my former classmate—if they rent someone else’s flat instead, we won’t get any money, Ah Kuen says, stroking Ah Ming’s cheek. Smiling, Ah Ming kisses the palm of her hand and replies, Whatever you say, my little lamb chop.

(I love you. I love you. I’ve never yearned for someone so much. I didn’t even know I could fall so hard—I can walk away from anyone but you. It’s as though you’ve drilled a hole in my heart and threaded anchor rope through it. In this city that’s so narrow and crowded that there’s barely any room for love, you’re the only fixed point where I can stand still. So, please don’t feel

doubtful or uneasy any longer: Ah Kuen will lend us the flat for free. This has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that she and I used to be an item.)

WHO: LOVER IN SHOPPERS’ PARADISE

It starts with the taste of a cigarette. Non-menthol, the diameter unsuitable for small fingers and polished nails, the Marlboro Gold as intense as semen (1). As the first puff curls up from your lips, the women you’re smoking with downstairs at the office snuff out the topic of conversation. You know what they’re waiting for. You gulp down the anticipation and unfamiliar smoke, then exhale: “My boyfriend didn’t have time to finish smoking the cigarettes he bought when he was here.” You can practically hear your words spark more curiosity in the women’s minds, but you don’t intend to fill in the blanks. You decide to make them grow, using silence and proper nourishment.

For example: “Mm-hmm. This really goes down much more smoothly over in England.” You toss the cigarette on the ground and stomp it out, then light another of your usual slim menthol cigarettes (2), disdain streaming down the corners of your mouth.

“A pack of Marlboro Golds and a pack of menthol slims, deduct it from my Octopus card,” you said last week at the 7-Eleven.

You know that on sleep-deprived days, you can start complaining to your coworkers that the time difference between you and your lover is too great—the time difference is truly a

little asshole that you can't control and that you can only make allowances for, oh, and you can also start replacing the American English words that dominate the office such as "like seriously" and "oh my God" and "bitch" with British English words like "darling" and "cuppa" and "wanker." The assorted Twinings tea bags (3) that you brew in the break room take the place of the fat-burning coffee (4) that the other women prefer. You know that their interest in you is limited to the following two topics: whether you've gained weight and whether your boyfriend has money. Regarding the former, you can nonchalantly nibble on the orange-flavored chocolate Jaffa cakes (5) that every English person adores, remarking, "Over there, I'm actually considered too skinny."

"May I pay by EPS?" you asked at Marks & Spencer after work the other day.

A change of eating habits may be one of the effects of love on women. Your last boyfriend broke up with you shortly after you graduated from college, but you still recall him taking you to a café in Soho (6), a restaurant in Kowloon City (7), and a dessert shop near the university (8). After breaking up, you often went back to the dessert shop alone and ordered the tiramisu and chilled mango pomelo sago pudding that the two of you had eaten. You knew the owner thought your boyfriend was dead and had become a spirit that only you could see. You placed the half-eaten desserts on the opposite side of the table and grinned at the owner, aware that you simply didn't want to admit that you were single again and that before long, the dessert shop would close down and it would somehow have something to do with you. This time, you don't play the game of having an invisible lover, although it

is in fact impossible for people in this city to observe your long-distance lover, who's in England. You say to the female coworker who's invited you to lunch, "I'm terribly sorry, but my boyfriend is vegetarian. He doesn't like me to eat meat." Then you pose with a plate of spinach and ricotta ravioli (9) and take beautifully composed selfies.

"Table for one, please," you said at the vegetarian restaurant to which you would eventually introduce your coworkers three days later.

You know those women are dying to grill you about the English gentleman whom no one has ever seen. A few make a fuss, saying they want to see his photo and get to know his story. You invariably smile and say that you can only share his pictures with his consent. This is a courtesy you've learned from his friends—English people aren't as fond of taking selfies as the couples and women in this city are, and furthermore, he always says he likes your personality more than your charming outward appearance and that he prefers to look at you directly through his retina than through a camera lens. So, will you eventually get married? they ask. Your smile is inlaid with his favorite bright red lipstick (10). If he finally proposes, haha. They ask about the ring you wear on your left hand (11)—that retro European style seems different from the modern goods found in this city. You purse your lips and say, He claims it wasn't very expensive, but I don't believe it.

"Can you go a little cheaper?" you asked at the flea market where all the artsy young women and unique jewelry gather.

He's also left behind evidence where no one else can see it. Sometimes, you sleep in a dark blue men's shirt (12) on those lonely and cold winter nights; sometimes, there's a single men's sock (13) in the corner of the room, and you remember how socks look when filled with appendages, then giggle in the room where you live by yourself. In addition to your usual toothbrush, there's a large-headed toothbrush for sensitive teeth (14) in the small bathroom, and so every night before you go to sleep, you think of the lover whom no one has seen. Love is a kind of intangible emotion, transformed from the soul, which is no more concrete, but fortunately, it can live off physical bodies, and can be materialized into physically concrete objects on which a price tag can be affixed and that can be used in actual transactions, such as champagne (15), teddy bears (16), and the Burt's Bees lip balm (17) he brought from England.

"I can get a 10% discount if I buy two lip balms, right?"
you asked at the Mannings on the ground level of your apartment building just before closing.

And more explicitly, the bouquets that mark all of the loved women on Valentine's Day. When the delivery person passes through the entire office to bring you a large bouquet of red roses and chocolate (18), you know that this bouquet is even bigger than the one your boss received from her husband—but your lover is a foreigner. Foreigners are always so exaggerated, from their physiques to their personalities. When the women swarm around the bouquet like bees to sweet-talk you into reading the message on the card, you use the British accent you learned from a British

variety show on YouTube to read aloud the English-language musings on love you found online: "I encounter millions of bodies in my life; of these millions, I may desire some hundreds; but of these hundreds, I love only one." You know this is a quote from *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse* (19), but these women who don't read books think your boyfriend is a real Casanova. It doesn't matter. Only you know that they've seen the entire physical body of this virtual boyfriend in the objects all around you.

shop list: (1&2) 7-Eleven (3) PARKnSHOP (4) stylist's own (5) Marks & Spencer (6) The Flying Pan (7) Islam Food (8) Sam Kee Dessert (9) VEGETARIAN (10) Bobbi Brown (11) stylist's own (12) Fred Perry (13) GAP (14) stylist's own (15) stylist's own (16) stylist's own (17) stylist's own (18) stylist's own (19) stylist's own

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企埋少少

/ Stand a Little Bit Closer

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

參考 Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*



一開始留意到那個奇怪的現象時，依依和阿熙正在乘搭往上的扶手電梯，依依在前面，阿熙在後面。依依背著阿熙、面向扶手電梯的前方，正好和站在她前面不遠處的一個年輕女孩面對面：那個女孩背著電梯運行的方向，雙手環抱著面向她的男朋友的頸。比女友站低一級的男孩低下頭，正好把臉埋進女友的胸前說話，讓女友咯咯傻笑。

日光日白，就在大庭廣眾之下這樣卿卿我我，難道不會有人側目嗎？依依望向左邊和右邊的扶手電梯，想看看有沒有其他人像她一樣盯著這對旁若無人地親熱的情侶，只發現了更多像那對情侶站法一樣的男女：無論是向上還是向下的扶手電梯，都是女生在前、男生在後，女生轉過來背向電梯運行的方向，雙手環抱住男生，而男生的手，則隨意降落在女生的後腦、臉頰、肩頸、腰背、臀部，直到扶手電梯到達終點之前，都不會分開。

依依很想轉過身去，問阿熙有沒有看見站在前面的那對情侶，可是她很清楚知道，自己並不是阿熙的女朋友，她沒有資格或膽量就這樣轉身，把自己置於只有女朋友才能自然地擺出的站姿裡。而且，就算她問了，那又怎樣？要是阿熙覺得那只不過是在高樓大廈林立的旺區商場裡必然會出現的自然現象，依依豈不是在他心中把自己塑造成一個大驚小怪的古板保守三姑六婆，或是妒忌年輕愛侶的熱情而心懷怨恨的惡毒剩女？要是阿熙也和她一樣，覺得在扶手電梯上攬攬錫錫會危害其他扶手電梯使用者的安全和安寧，並決定和依依在電梯上從此站得更遠，她可不是白白害自己失去了在電梯上親近他的機會？

依依原本很高興能和阿熙一起逛商場，她甚至特地為此穿了一件在後腰開了一個洞的裙子，讓腰帶上方的一小截皮膚若隱若現，希望阿熙會注意到並覺得驚喜，可惜阿熙好像沒有什麼反應。在穿過區內無數的商場期間，依依和阿熙一起乘搭了那麼多次扶手電梯，由商場的地庫二樓到十二樓再回到地面，每一次阿熙都讓她先踏上扶手電梯，也許是出於「Ladies first」的紳士風度，也可能是希望可以在她後方多看幾眼她露出的腰肢？每次搭上扶手電梯時，依依都下意識地吸氣、挺胸收腹，希望可以讓顯露在阿熙面前的後腰看起來瘦一點，明明她的胸和腹都長在身體前面而不是後面。可是，阿熙完全沒有提起依依今天穿露背裙這一點，使依依相當失望。

難道她對阿熙來說，真是一點吸引力都沒有嗎？如果這是一齣偶像劇，接下應該要發生的情節，就是前面那對正在耳鬢廝磨的情侶親熱得太過激烈，讓女生不小心鬆開手，原本抓在手裡的智能電話因應扶手電梯的斜度和偶像劇中不符合物理學的邏輯，朝離開她只幾級梯級之遙的依依臉上直飛過去——依依必須失去重心但不失優雅地邊尖叫邊往後跌，然後，阿熙必須像所有偶像劇的男主角一樣，為了保護女主角依依而伸出雙手接住往後倒下的依依的背，以比武打明星更穩的腳步把二人的體重安全地支撐在半空，並停在一個像社交舞的下腰姿勢般的英雄救美式環抱中，四目交投，讓二人發現自己對對方好像有了心動的感覺。可是，這畢竟不是一齣偶像劇，而是一座繁忙的商場，扶手電梯已經把依依和阿熙送到盡頭，她和他仍然是兩個人而不是一雙。而前面那對情侶，已經回到並排連體嬰的姿勢，勾肩搭背地以非常阻街的方法前行，消失在商場中更多對在週末出門拍拖的情侶之間。

依依開始對這段本來就沒有太多實質希望的單戀更加絕望了。她到底是為了什麼原因，才會以為只要穿上略顯性感的露背裙，就能使他和自己靠近多一步？難道依依真的以為阿熙是那種容易被女性裸露的肌膚迷惑的人嗎？她所認識的阿熙明明不是那麼膚淺的人——雖然其實，依依也很清楚知道，自己對於阿熙，還有那麼多不了解的事情。因此，她才會跟著他到鬧市來，跟他走遍大小商場和商業大廈裡的每一間行山用品專門店，只為尋找他想要的某一個牌子的某一個型號、某一個產地、某一種配色的背囊：她想抓住每一個跟在他身邊看見他的世界的機會，她想知道他的興趣、習慣、社交圈子，那些比一般朋友更深入的私生活層面，那些只有親近的人才能看見的過去和現在。可是，使阿熙感興趣的事情有那麼多，依依只是他世界裡的一小部份，有那麼多她不知道的事，他都只和她以外的人說。到底要怎麼樣，她才可以再走進他的內心更深的地方，看見他還未讓她看見的事情呢？

阿熙帶她到旺區的另一邊尋找一間行山用品店，在那幢幾十層樓高的商業大廈大堂排隊等車的人，已經多得需要幾個穿反光背心的保安員站在大廈外的馬路上維持秩序，把想進入大廈的人按樓層分流、排隊等候前往不同樓層的電梯。向左邊延伸的人龍在騎樓下長得繞到街角後面，向右邊延伸的人龍則能站在騎樓外專門為排隊的人架起的帳篷下面等候，不至於佔領整條行人路。阿熙見了，忍不住爆出一句粗口。依依想都沒想就說，沒關係，應該不用等很久的。阿熙嘆了一口氣，向她道歉，並努力尋找各種話題，填滿等車的時間。依依聽著他講生活裡的各種無謂事，說他的堂兄弟最近生了孩子，他阿爺後生時做過什麼蠢事，他最近在日式雜貨店買了什麼奇怪的零食，邊看著其他排隊的情侶在隊伍

裡繼續攬攬錫錫、讓手在彼此身上遊走，他們看起來多麼的快樂——依依忽然覺得，很累了。她特地為約會而穿的高跟鞋已經把她的腳蹠割損，從不行山做運動的雙腿已經不想再站立了，而阿熙就算說起他剛才在街角看見的「企街」，都無法讓她覺得有趣了。她的腰背和雙腳都好痛，但她仍然無法和他走得更近。她忽然覺得，好卑微。

隊伍不時向前移動，已進電梯的人讓人龍縮短一點，又再停下來，等待裝滿人的電梯逐層清空、回到地面。依依強裝微笑地一直回應著阿熙的東拉西扯，好不容易跟隨著人龍，來到電梯前面了。負責按車的管理員一直叫已經在電梯裡的人企入少少、唔該大家拍硬檔企埋少少、仲可以再入多兩個啊唔該晒，即使已經站進小小的電梯裡的人，都一臉茫然看著車外，等著看管理員什麼時候才肯縮開擋住車門的手，讓電梯終於向上升。你兩個入埋嚟啦，管理員對阿熙和依依招手。依依看著電梯裡已經壓縮得像石油氣粒子的許多隻腳，懷疑是否真的能擠得下多四隻腳而不讓電梯過重，可是在下一秒，阿熙已經站進去了，在他面前空出只夠裝一個人的空間，看著她，等她進去。她吸了一口氣，踏進電梯，拉直身體，然後，車門就關上了。

竟然沒有過重的電梯開始上升，依依這才意識到，自己正背向阿熙站著，像在扶手電梯上時一樣。但不同的是，在這擠迫得像日本的滿員電車一般的密閉空間裡，她的臀部剛好觸及他的大腿：這樣的觸碰，難道不就和讓她坐在他大腿上一般親密嗎？她完全不敢動，連用力呼吸也不敢，以免驚動阿熙，或者惹來其他和她一起擠電梯的人不滿。不要想太多，她告訴自己。在這種商業大

廈的電梯裡，不論是誰都必須這樣擠在一起的，就算是耶穌和佛陀也好，明星和小孩也好，只要來到這裡，都得一視同仁地擠，就像是在日本的公共澡堂裡，誰也不會為了在陌生人面前赤身露體而覺得大驚小怪——可是，為什麼她那麼在意自己背上那一小片露在布料以外的皮膚，正輕輕貼在阿熙的襯衫前襟這一點呢？電梯裡四面都是鏡，可是人太多了，她無法看見阿熙的臉，或是自己是否正在臉紅；她唯一知道的是，她很高興，心跳和呼吸都變得明顯，而且，腳痛也不再緊要了。只要兩個人有成為戀人的緣份，整個宇宙都會合謀讓他們走在一起：這座擠迫的城市，似乎仍提供了眾多讓依依和阿熙理所當然地站近彼此的機會。也許，只是也許，剛才堅持要她和他一起擠進爆滿的電梯的管理員，就是宇宙派來幫助依依的丘比特？依依輕輕地伸展了一下緊張的腰：來吧，電梯，讓我們再企埋少少，再企埋少少吧。

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企埋少少

/ Stand a Little Bit Closer

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

After Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*



When Yee Yee first noticed the strange phenomenon, she and Ah Hei were riding the escalator up, Yee Yee in front, Ah Hei behind. Yee Yee had her back to Ah Hei, looking toward the top of the escalator, finding herself face-to-face with a young woman standing not that far ahead of her, the young woman positioned backwards on the escalator, both arms wrapped around her boyfriend's neck. The man standing one step below his girlfriend lowered his head, burying his face into her chest and mumbling something that made her giggle.

Wouldn't being so lovey-dovey in front of everyone in broad daylight raise people's eyebrows? Yee Yee gazed at the escalators on either side, wanting to see if anyone else was staring at the lovebirds falling all over each other, oblivious to anyone else, only to discover more men and women standing just like them—whether the escalator was going up or down, the woman was always in front, the man behind, the woman facing backwards, both arms wrapped around the man's neck, while the man's hands casually landed on the back of the woman's head, cheeks, shoulders and neck, waist, or butt, not letting go until the escalator reached the end.

Yee Yee wanted to turn around and ask Ah Hei whether he spied the lovebirds standing in front, but she was well aware she wasn't Ah Hei's girlfriend, and she didn't have the qualifications or nerve to just turn around like that and adopt a pose that was only

fit for a girlfriend. Moreover, even if she did ask, then what? If Ah Hei felt it was merely a natural phenomenon that was bound to occur in high-rise malls in bustling shopping districts, wouldn't Yee Yee give him the impression she was a fuddy-duddy busybody, or a vindictive, vicious leftover woman jealous of the passion of young sweethearts? If Ah Hei, like her, felt that engaging in PDA would endanger the safety and tranquility of other escalator riders, and from then on decided to stand even farther apart from her on the escalator, wouldn't she have wasted an opportunity to get closer to him while riding it?

Yee Yee had been happy to go shopping with Ah Hei, even intentionally wearing a dress with a hole in the lower back that showed a little skin above the belt, hoping that Ah Hei would notice and be pleasantly surprised, but unfortunately, he didn't seem to have any reaction. As they passed through mall after mall in the neighborhood, Yee Yee and Ah Hei rode numerous escalators together from B2 to the twelfth floor and then back down to the ground. Each time, Ah Hei let her step onto the escalator first—maybe he was adopting a gentlemanly demeanor of “ladies first,” or might he have been hoping to catch a few more glimpses of her exposed waist in the back? Whenever she got on the escalator, Yee Yee subconsciously inhaled, sticking out her chest and sucking in her stomach, hoping to make her exposed lower back look a bit slimmer to Ah Hei, though obviously her chest and stomach protruded from the front of her body, not behind. However, Ah Hei

hadn't mentioned a single word about the backless dress Yee Yee had on that day, leaving her quite disappointed.

Was she really not at all attractive to Ah Hei? If this were an idol drama, what would happen next would be that the lovebirds in front of them would become too hot and heavy, causing the woman to inadvertently let go, and due to the slope of the escalator and the physics-defying logic of the idol drama, the smartphone she'd been holding would fly straight into Yee Yee's face, which was only a few steps away from her—losing her balance, Yee Yee would fall backwards while screaming gracefully, and then, like all leading men in idol dramas, in order to protect the leading lady Yee Yee, Ah Hei would stretch out his hands and catch her back as she fell, safely supporting both of their weight mid-air with steadier steps than a martial arts star, frozen in an embrace with his hands on her waist, a hero rescuing a damsel in distress, lost in each other's eyes, the two of them discovering they had feelings for each other. Alas, this wasn't an idol drama after all, but a busy shopping mall. The escalator had transported Yee Yee and Ah Hei to the end. She and he were still two people instead of a couple. Meanwhile, the lovebirds in front resumed their side-by-side position like conjoined twins, blocking the way as they walked shoulder-to-shoulder, disappearing into the mall among flocks of lovebirds who were out on weekend dates.

Yee Yee began to despair even more about this unrequited

love that didn't have much real hope. Why on earth had she thought that wearing a slightly sexy backless dress would bring him one step closer to her? Did Yee Yee truly think that Ah Hei was the kind of person who was easily seduced by women's bare skin? The Ah Hei she knew wasn't that shallow—although the truth was, Yee Yee also knew very well that there were still many things she didn't understand about Ah Hei. And so, she accompanied him to busy shopping areas, went with him to every hiking supplies store in every shopping mall and commercial building no matter how big or small, just to find a backpack he wanted in a certain model of a certain brand, from a certain place of origin, in a certain color scheme. She wanted to seize every opportunity to accompany him and see his world. She wanted to know his interests, habits, and social circles, those aspects of his private life that only those who were more than ordinary friends could dive into, the past and present that only those close to him could see. However, Ah Hei's interests were varied, and Yee Yee was only a small part of his world—there were so many things she didn't know that he only told to people other than her. What would it take for her to delve deeper into his heart and see what he hadn't yet shown her?

Ah Hei brought her to the other side of the bustling shopping district in search of a hiking supplies store. The lobby of the multi-storied commercial building was teeming with people waiting in line for the lift. There were numerous security guards in reflective vests standing on the road outside the building

maintaining order, dividing people who wanted to enter the building according to floors and lining them up in front of different lifts. The left-snaking line wound around the street corner beneath the overhang, while those in the right-snaking line were able to stand beneath tents set up for those outside the overhang, so as not to occupy the entire sidewalk. At the sight, Ah Hei couldn't help but bust out a swear word. Without thinking, Yee Yee said, It doesn't matter—the wait shouldn't be too long. Sighing, Ah Hei apologized to her and tried to find various topics to fill the time spent waiting for the lift. Yee Yee listened to him prattle on about all sorts of mundane things—his cousin's new baby, the stupid things his paternal grandpa had done as a kid, the weird snacks he'd recently bought at the Japanese grocery store—in the meantime also watching the other lovebirds in line continue to engage in PDA, running their hands all over each other. They looked so happy; suddenly, Yee Yee was exhausted. The high heels she wore specifically for this date were cutting into her feet, and her legs, which had never gone hiking, no longer wanted to stand. Ah Hei couldn't even pique her interest by mentioning the streetwalker he'd just seen on the corner. Her back and feet were killing her, but still, she couldn't get closer to him. She felt deflated.

Every now and then, the line moved forward, shortening a little as people entered the lift, and then there was a lull as they waited for the full lift to empty floor-by-floor and return to the ground. Pasting on a smile, Yee Yee kept responding to Ah Hei's

ramblings, struggling to follow the line, until finally they arrived in front of the lift. Even though the people jammed inside the tiny lift blankly stared outside of it, waiting for the attendant to withdraw the hand blocking the doors so that the lift could finally rise up, the attendant kept telling them, Move inside a little bit more. Please help everyone by standing a little bit closer together. There's room for two more. Thank you very much. The attendant waved to Ah Hei and Yee Yee, You two get in there as well. Yee Yee studied the countless feet inside the lift that had been compressed like liquefied petroleum gas particles, wondering whether four more feet could really squeeze inside without overloading it, but in the next second, Ah Hei had already entered, leaving just enough space for one person in front of him, watching her, waiting for her to come inside. Taking a deep breath, she stepped into the lift, straightened her body, and then, the doors closed.

The surprisingly not-overloaded lift began to rise. Yee Yee realized she was standing with her back to Ah Hei, the same as on the escalator. But the difference was, that in this confined space that was as crowded as a jam-packed train in Japan, her hips grazed his thighs—wasn't this kind of touch as intimate as letting her sit on his lap? She didn't dare move at all, didn't dare breathe too hard, lest she disturb Ah Hei, or annoy the other people crammed inside the lift with her. Don't think too much, she told herself. Inside the lift of this kind of commercial building, everyone had to huddle together in this way regardless of who they were, even Jesus and

Buddha, celebrities and children—whoever came here was equally pushed and shoved, just like how in Japanese public baths, being stark naked in front of strangers was no big deal; however, why was she so focused on the bare patch of skin on her back that was gently pressing against the front of Ah Hei's shirt? The lift was surrounded by mirrors, but there were so many people that she couldn't see Ah Hei's face or whether she herself was blushing—all she knew was that she was happy, and her heartbeat and breathing had become more prominent, and moreover, the pain in her feet no longer mattered. As long as two people were fated to become lovers, the entire universe would conspire to bring them together. This crowded city still seemed to offer plenty of opportunities for Yee Yee and Ah Hei to naturally stand close to each other. Maybe, just maybe, might the attendant who'd insisted that she and Ah Hei squeeze into the packed lift have been Cupid sent by the universe to help Yee Yee? Yee Yee gently stretched her tense waist. C'mon, lift, help us stand a little bit closer, then just a little bit more.

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恆久忍耐

/ Patient

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

參考 Edward Hopper, *Eleven A.M.*, 1926



我回來了，妳說。回來就好，她說。其實不好，妳想。肺炎在香港已經蔓延兩個月，她和其他一直都在香港生活的人，已經走過了最初的震驚、搶購期，逐漸適應了疫症之下的日常作息，甚至已經開始鬆懈，鬆開口罩、再次上街約會——妳本來在澳洲聽著她兩個月來如此轉述，一直都擔當安慰她的角色，不斷問她要不要寄酒精搓手液或打氣小禮物給她，提醒她要多留在家裡防疫，結果過了白色情人節不久，澳洲的疫情終於使妳和她都擔心起來。當全世界的人都開始搶購廁紙、鼓吹留家抗疫時，妳和她的角色就對調了。妳有買夠食物嗎，她問。澳洲買得到口罩嗎，她問。澳洲的海關限制很嚴格，我沒有辦法寄任何食物給妳，妳要好好照顧自己啊，她說。妳很認真地答應她，我會的，我要活下來參加畢業禮，然後回港和妳一起「掃街」，我要吃煎釀三寶、楊枝甘露、菠蘿油和甜醬腸粉，妳說。好啊，等疫情過去以後，我們就去吃，她說。妳和她透過視像通話，虛擬地勾了手指尾。再過了幾天，妳還在考慮要不要聽媽媽的話、像其他留學生一樣買機票回港避難時，她說看見了澳洲不斷上升的確診數字、很擔心妳的安全，妳就下定決心當日收拾好家當、在香港一間曾經租給大學用來隔離大陸回港學生的酒店訂好了房間，第二天就把自己用風衣、手套、眼鏡和口罩包裹起來，萬分警戒地坐飛機回港，在酒店開始十四日自我隔離的生活。

回來就好，她說。妳關上酒店房門後，也有了同感；過了幾天，澳洲航空甚至停飛所有國際航線，要不是妳已經回港，大概就要游水回來了。至少現在妳和她都在同一座城市裡，就算全世界都陷入了如同世界大戰一般翻天覆地並完全不見盡頭的災難，至少妳回來了，從此能和她在同一座城的邊境裡共生共死。她要妳答

應她在十四日之內絕對不踏出酒店半步，寧願花費一個口罩出門買了許多妳告訴過她妳喜歡吃的香港零食、汽水，送到妳的酒店去，請職員運到妳房門前，還在補給品裡偷偷塞了打氣心意卡、酒精搓手液、日本面膜和指甲油，讓妳在酒店裡過得精彩一點。妳打開那袋裝得滿滿的超市膠袋時，忍不住邊甜笑邊哭：雪菜肉絲味公仔米粉，四洲紫菜，時興隆魷魚絲，維他檸檬茶，嘉頓檸檬夾心餅，她居然全部都記得。她說，我當然記得啊。妳想，妳真的沒有猜錯，她應該也喜歡妳，因為妳說過的話，她全部記得，而她說過的話，妳也全部記得。

而妳居然真的有那麼想念這些食物。在澳洲生活的日子，妳的廚房裡從沒缺過維他檸檬茶和出前一丁，但妳還是只能想念新鮮炸好熱得燙嘴的椒鹽炸燒賣、半夜街頭的生菜魚肉溝碗仔翅，和她。妳多次想像回港以後要怎樣大口大口地吃下所有想念的食物，要去哪幾間茶餐廳、車仔麵，要怎樣不顧一切地抱緊她不放，告訴她妳有多想念她，抱住她深深地呼吸。然而疫情一襲來，妳的思念，只能繼續延長。她把自己當作妳的隔離檢疫官，每天不定時要妳拍照證明妳正乖乖地留在酒店裡，當然妳明白這只是她想每天看見妳的臉的借口，妳也樂於配合演出，每天把自己的room service菜式和零食下午茶拍照傳她、報告妳當日的體溫，甚至約好在晚飯時間透過視像通話一起各自用餐，像太空人和地球人的約會。在無法離開房間、親身接觸香港街道的日子裡，她為妳送來熟悉的味道，讓妳邊吃邊看著窗外縮得小小的街景、藏著她身影的城市，慢慢有了真的回到了香港的真實感。回來真好，妳看著正在螢幕裡大口大口地吃外賣叉雞飯的她說。妳回來了，我就放心了，她笑著說，妳看見她牙齒上好像沾了薑

蔥，但妳仍覺得她多麼優雅美麗。

在隔離的日子裡，妳從未試過和她如此親密，日出、日落，在同一時區一同隔空進食，看同一座城的新聞發佈會和確診數字，每天互道早安晚安，一樣的作息，一樣的潮汐。在無法抵抗時差而醒來的清晨，妳看著仍未收到她的早安訊息的手機，數算著妳在疫症爆發前和她說過要去吃的一切街頭小食。妳本來想和她一起去吃炭燒雞蛋仔，趁她一手拿著錢包一手拿著熱燙的雞蛋仔時順理成章地餵她吃一顆熱脆的雞蛋仔，也許妳的指頭因此終於可以碰到她的唇；或者可以每人選購一杯不同口味的珍珠奶茶，然後假借試味透過飲管間接接吻，像兩個熟不拘禮的朋友，或合盃交杯的新人。妳也想像過用拇指指腹幫她輕輕抹去臉頰上沾到的椒鹽魷魚碎屑、順便捧著她的臉和她四目交投，捧著一碗咖哩魚蛋和燒賣等她把臉湊近妳來讓妳餵食，或是在難以用手抹去的糖漿沾到她嘴角時大膽吻下——那都是妳在外地無法和她親身共處時，默默告訴自己將來回港後就有機會勇敢嘗試的親密，以及只要回來就能不再只停留於想念的面孔和味道。妳可是多麼的，多麼的想碰觸她，即使要先假借美食來巧立名目，若無其事地試探。

然而當下真正的愛，就是不讓妳深愛的對象承受任何被病毒感染的風險，而凡人的偉大不是隨便以身犯險，而是時刻平靜忍耐。如果她因為和妳一起去「掃街」而染病，或是妳不知道自己已染上病毒卻出門感染了路人、而路人最終把病毒輾轉傳到她身上，妳將永遠無法原諒自己。妳喜歡她，很喜歡很喜歡她，喜歡得願意忍耐著不去見她，只要她安好。那麼，就繼續忍耐下去吧。等

隔離期結束，等疫情過去，等她回覆。妳從她送來的物資裡取出兩片紫菜，把它黏在上唇內側扮成兩隻長牙，然後裝鬼臉自拍給她看：我是一隻海象，剛從澳洲游水回港，請多多指教，嘿嘿，妳說。然後妳獨自躺在酒店空虛的king size床裡，等她在自己家的單人床上醒來，笑著回應。

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英譯本2020年刊於國際翻譯文學期刊《Asymptote》網上專題 “In This Together: Writers From Around the World Respond to the COVID-19 Outbreak”（譯者：Jennifer Feeley）。

恆久忍耐

/ Patient

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

After Edward Hopper, *Eleven A.M.*, 1926



I'm back in town, you say. It's good you're back, she says. But it's not good, you think. During the past two months, the virus has spread throughout Hong Kong. She and others who've been living in the city have moved past the initial frenzy of shock and panic buying, gradually adapting to daily life under the pandemic. They've even started letting down their guard, loosening their masks and venturing out on the streets again; you'd been in Australia, listening to her report such things for two months, always taking on the role of comforting her, constantly offering to send her hand sanitizer or a small gift to cheer her up, urging her to stay home as much as possible to avoid infection, and then, in mid-March, not long after White Day, the outbreak in Australia finally began to worry you both. When people all over the world started buying up toilet paper and advocating staying at home to fight the pandemic, your roles were reversed. Have you bought enough food? she asked. Can you buy masks in Australia? she asked. Australia's customs restrictions are so stringent—I can't send you any food. Please take good care of yourself, she said. You solemnly promised her, I will. I'll make it through graduation, and then I'll come back to Hong Kong and we'll "sweep street," hitting up all the good food places. I'm going to eat fried stuffed three treasures, mango pomelo sago, buttered pineapple buns, and rice noodle rolls with sweet sauce, you said. Okay, when the outbreak is over, we'll go eat, she said. You talked to her over video, virtually hooking pinkies. A few days later, while you were still contemplating whether to be a dutiful daughter and heed

your mother's advice to buy a plane ticket back to Hong Kong, seeking refuge like other overseas students, she said she saw that confirmed cases in Australia were continuing to climb, and she was concerned for your safety, and so that very day, you made up your mind to pack up your belongings and booked a room in a Hong Kong hotel that previously had been used to quarantine university students returning to the city from the mainland. The next day, you cocooned yourself in a windbreaker, gloves, glasses, and a mask and flew back to Hong Kong, every nerve on edge, embarking on your life of fourteen days of hotel self-quarantine.

It's good you're back, she says. You feel the same way when you close the hotel door. A few days later, Qantas goes as far as grounding all international flights—if you hadn't already returned to Hong Kong, you probably would've had to swim back. At least now you're both in the same city. Even if the whole world is caught in the same war-like disaster that's turned the planet on its head with absolutely no end in sight, at least you're back, and from now on you can live and die alongside her within the borders of the same city. She makes you promise her you won't set even half a foot outside the hotel for fourteen days. She'd rather use up a mask shopping for the numerous Hong Kong snacks and soft drinks you told her are your favorites, dropping them off at your hotel and asking the staff to deliver them to your door, tucking inside a few extra goodies to brighten your hotel stay: a card to boost your spirits, hand sanitizer, Japanese sheet masks, and nail polish. When

you open the overstuffed plastic grocery bag, you can't help but sweetly smile and tear up at the same time: Doll pickled vegetable and pork instant rice noodles, Four Seas toasted seaweed, Sze Hing Loong dried seasoned cuttlefish, Vita lemon tea, and Garden Lemon Puff cookies—she's remembered them all. She says, C'mon, of course I remember! You think your hunch is really spot-on; she must like you too, since she remembers every word you've said, and you remember every word she's said.

And how you've really missed these foods. When you lived in Australia, your kitchen was never without Vita lemon tea and Nissin Demae ramen, but still, you could only miss the fresh deep-fried salt-and-pepper siu mai that was so hot it'd burn your mouth, a midnight street snack of lettuce and fish balls mixed with imitation shark fin soup, and her. Over and over, you've imagined how after coming back to Hong Kong, you'll chow down on all the foods you've missed, which cha chaan tengs and cart noodle shops you'll eat at, how you'll cling to her despite everything and not let go, telling her how much you've missed her, holding her and breathing deeply, but now that the outbreak has hit, your longing can only be prolonged. She thinks of herself as your quarantine officer: at a different time each day, she asks you to take photos proving that you're obediently staying inside the hotel. Of course, you know it's just an excuse for her to see your face day after day, and you're happy to play along. Every day you send her photos of your room service dishes and snack-filled afternoon tea and report

your daily temperature—you even arrange to have dinner together over video chat, like a date between an astronaut and someone on earth. In the days when you can't leave your room and make personal contact with the streets of Hong Kong, she sends you familiar tastes so that as you eat, you can gaze out the window at the miniature streetscapes and city that conceals her silhouette, slowly absorbing the reality that you've really come back to Hong Kong. It's really good you're back, says she on the screen scarfing down take-out char siu pork and chicken on rice. Now that you're back, I can breathe easy, she says, smiling. You see she has ginger and scallions stuck in her teeth, but still, you think how elegant and beautiful she is.

You've never been so close to her as you are during quarantine—sunrise, sunset, separately eating meals together in the same time zone, keeping an eye on the same city's press conferences and number of confirmed cases, saying good morning and good night to each other every day, following the same routine, the same tide. When you wake up early in the morning unable to fight off jet lag, you check your phone that hasn't yet received her good morning message, counting all the street snacks you told her you hoped to eat before the pandemic broke out. You wanted to go with her to eat charcoal grilled egg waffles, seizing the opportunity of her holding her purse in one hand and a scorching egg waffle in the other to feed her a piece of hot, crispy waffle as though it were perfectly natural, and perhaps your fingers would graze her lips

at last. Or, each of you could buy a cup of different-flavored bubble tea, then under the guise of taking a taste, indirectly kiss through straws, like two friends close enough to dispense with formalities, or newlyweds exchanging cups of wine on their wedding night. You also imagined your thumb gently brushing bits of salt-and-pepper squid from her cheek, cupping her face and locking eyes in the process, holding a bowl of curried fish balls and siu mai while waiting for her to bring her face closer so that you could feed her, or being bold enough to kiss the hard-to-wipe-away syrup staining the corner of her mouth. You imagined all this while you were abroad and couldn't be together with her in person, the intimacy you silently told yourself you'd have a chance to bravely try once you were back in Hong Kong, along with the face and tastes you'd no longer be stuck missing as long as you came back. How you long, oh how you long to touch her, even if you have to use food to cook up various excuses, putting out feelers like it's no big deal.

However, at this moment, true love means not exposing the object of your deep affection to any risk of being infected by the virus, and the greatness of an ordinary person is not to casually engage in high-risk behavior, but to be calm and patient at all times. If she becomes infected from going "sweep street" with you, or if you don't know you have the virus but go out and infect people on the street, who in turn end up infecting her, you'll never be able to forgive yourself. You like her, you really, really like her, you like her so much that you're willing to be patient and not see her, as long as

she's safe and sound. And so, just keep on being patient. Wait for the quarantine period to pass by, wait for the outbreak to subside, wait for her to reply. You pluck two pieces of seaweed from the goodies she sent, stick them inside your upper lip to form two tusks, then make a funny face and send her a selfie. I'm a walrus who just swam back to Hong Kong from Australia—it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, heehee, you say. Then you lie alone in the hotel's empty king-size bed, waiting for her to wake up in her own single bed at home, chuckling in response.

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過埠新娘

/ Overseas Bride

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

參考 Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*



在滿城的人都在搜尋移民方法的那晚妳說，不如真的嫁給我，當個過埠新娘，逃離身處的城好了。我一如以往地笑著，溫柔地轉移話題。我最親愛的，難道我會對妳說不嗎。但我無法對妳說好。並不是因為，我不願意在眾人面前給妳一個婚姻的名份，或是在和妳維持已婚狀況的許多年期間不和其他人結婚，或是不願意在助妳取得此地的居留權後為妳背上離婚者的身份，再看著妳和妳真正想與之在婚姻裡白頭到老的人終於全心全意地結婚。或是，妳在漫長的居留權申請期間決定和我從此一雙一對地生活，也很好，我會像古老的大樹一樣愛妳，像陽光下微涼的溪流，像安靜而緩慢的風，像過去，像現在。只要妳來，我就會在這城的家裡張開雙臂，迎接妳的所有家當和傷痕，妳的全部，我都願意接收。只是，我真的不確定，要是妳來了，真的就能快樂嗎。

如果妳嫁到我所在的城來，妳將要離開妳的母語，從此活在一種妳在學校裡以考試測驗和自卑感學來的語言之中。妳將一再以第二語言介紹妳的身世，對方也許明白妳逃離的原因，也許不。在這邊，也不是沒有來自我們出生地的人，但我們是少數中的少數，就算有唐人街，也沒有以我們的母語寫成的八卦雜誌，廣告裡夾硬嚟只求服務產品特色的諧音標語，粗口橫飛的長氣的士司機，茶餐廳裡重複播著的犯駁處境喜劇，滿口懶音的吵鬧中學生，那些多麼重要、多麼嘈雜的聲音。我們就算能在此一無所懼地牽手上街，公然向彼此說盡一切敏感的話，但在這邊，我們再也無法和明白心涼和心寒是哪兩種完全不同的感受的人擦肩，在地下鐵裡坐在我們身邊的人，不會知道阿茂整的是什麼餅、死雞撈的是誰的飯蓋。

這裡也許有養殖環境受到嚴格管制的本地豬肉，但養殖這些豬的人，不會知道為什麼世上會有人要跪地餵豬鬃，什麼是豬籠入水，什麼叫食咗人隻豬，什麼叫男人靠得住豬鬃都會上樹。這裡沒有妳的舊同學，在畢業多年後半取笑半恭維地說妳的工作一定使妳發過豬頭；這裡也沒有妳的眾多親戚，在農曆新年的聚餐上吹噓自己從豉油撈飯的年代拼搏到魚翅撈飯的年代，見過城裡許多的大風大浪，最終收成眾多的資產與虛榮。我知道妳會想念的，這些誇大與低俗，那些原本使妳厭倦的血緣責任和俾面派對——當妳再也無法和親友頻繁會面至厭倦的地步，妳的寂寞，只有我和這邊不正宗不地道的仿造品可以排解，但是足夠嗎，這邊這些絕對不比任何兒女優勝的叉燒，明明不吃狗卻在學校常被入說只要一笑就會很像焗熟狗頭的我。如果我不足以代替妳的全世界，妳在這邊找到的戀人，會明白妳以重新學習的語言說出的情話嗎，會明白使妳學會何為愛情的地方，對妳來說有多重要嗎。

我並非認為一座城的人必須和來自同一座城的人結合、生育血統純正的下一代，而且如果妳不來，也許妳連最真誠的情話也無法再隨意說出。我只是不忍心看妳從此深陷在母語對妳身邊的人並無意義的孤獨中，遠離眾多和妳同聲同氣的人，刑期終生。我本來以為，最終會是由我為妳飄洋過海，回到妳身邊，和妳在說著一樣的語言、聽著同一批笑話長大的人之中，一起說些聽過好多次的老生常談。我會笑妳不管天氣如何仍然喜歡上面蒸鬆糕下面賣涼粉的打扮，以過大的長袖毛衣配搭迷你裙；我們可以一年又一年的看香港小姐候選人穿著泳衣回答資深主持人提出的問題，對那些發明星夢的女子毫不客氣地評頭品足。我們也可以每年排

隊擠進書展裡看由人代筆的明星書熱賣，我會聽著妳再次慨嘆人人都說這座城是文化沙漠，明明有那麼多優秀的作家、獲得國際獎項的詩人、門票價錢比外國便宜許多的舞台劇更值得被關注，而我會附和，以一種恨鐵不成鋼的心情。至少在這裡，我們的母語活著，並且容得下我們挑剔，因為母語在此只是理所當然，而非需要刻意被保育、鼓勵使用、立法保護的，少數族裔語言。母語在母語的生產地是多數，而我們在我們出生的地方，明明才是多數。然後如果那時妳真的向我提出結婚的要求，那將不會是因為想逃亡，而是想留下來種下什麼，長出什麼：我們可以長出長遠而有益於社會的事業，熱愛學習的後代，甚至感動他人的藝術，和城內所有老人一起安享的晚年。而我們之間，再也不需要因為一座城市的風雨，才使妳考慮與我相守。

許許多多的話語在舌尖如泡沫升起，又在吐出前輕輕地破滅，消散。我最親愛的，我所在的城，相對妳所在的城，也許算是一座在可見的未來也不會傾倒的石樓，但這邊的風景真的能使妳快樂嗎？親愛的，親愛的，我到底如何能用最溫柔最輕盈的話語，告訴妳我所預視的，在我這邊也能使妳缺氧的失語。我發現自己無話可說。所以妳說吧。妳繼續說，盡情地說吧。像人工呼吸一樣，像吐出煙圈一樣。像活人一樣，繼續說吧。

20200525

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過埠新娘

/ Overseas Bride

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

After Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*



The night everyone in the entire city was scrambling for ways to emigrate, you said you might as well marry me, become an overseas bride, and flee the city in which you live. I smiled my usual smile, gently changing the subject. My dearest, how can I say no to you? But there's no way I can say yes to you. It's not that I don't want to make you my wife in name in front of everyone, or be unable to marry anyone else during the many years of our marriage, or that I'm unwilling to bear the title of divorcé after helping you obtain residency here, witnessing you and the person with whom you really want to grow old eventually marching into wedded bliss. Or, during the never-ending period of applying for residency, should you choose to spend the rest of your life side-by-side with me, that would also be wonderful; I'd love you like an ancient tree, like a cool stream beneath the sun, like a quiet, slow breeze, like the past, like the present. As long as you come here, I'll fling open my arms in my home in this other city, welcoming all of your possessions and scars, every part of you—I'm willing to accept it all. It's just I'm not really sure: If you come here, can you truly be happy?

If you marry into my city, you'll have to leave your mother tongue, from here on out living in a language acquired in school via exams and inferiority complexes. You'll repeat your life story time and again in a second language—the other person might understand your reasons for leaving, or they might not. Here, it's not that there aren't any people who share our birthplace, but

we're the minority of a minority. Even though there's a Chinatown, there are no gossip magazines penned in our mother tongue, no ads with slogans containing forced puns tailored to fit whatever product is being peddled, no long-winded, foul-mouthed taxi drivers, no recurring situation comedies playing out in cha chaan tengs, no boisterous, lazy-tongued secondary school students—those oh-so-important, oh-so-cacophonous sounds. Even though we can walk down the streets here, holding hands without fear, openly discussing all sensitive subjects, we'll no longer be able to rub shoulders with those who understand the two completely different feelings of "cold-blooded" and "blood-chilling," and the person sitting beside us on the subway won't know what kind of cakes Johnny half-bakes, or who's reluctant to eat crow.

Here, there may be local pork raised in a strictly regulated environment, but the people who raise these pigs won't know why there are people in the world willing to sweat like pigs to bring home the bacon, what is meant by filling up the piggy bank, the meaning of a chauvinist pig porking the bride on her wedding night, or the meaning of the phrase "when pigs fly, on men you can rely." Here, there are none of your former classmates half-teasing, half-complimenting you years after graduation that your job surely allows you to live high on the hog; likewise, here, there are none of your multitudinous relatives boasting about their travails from rags to riches over Lunar New Year dinners, finally amassing various assets and accolades after weathering storm after storm

in the city. I know you'll miss these things, these exaggerations and vulgarities, those family obligations and perfunctory social gatherings that you're sick of—when you can no longer see your family and friends often enough to grow tired of them, your loneliness can only be assuaged by me and the pale imitations here, but will it be enough? Here, the char siu pork is so tasteless that even the most good-for-nothing son or daughter is preferable, and people in school remark that I, who clearly doesn't eat pet birds, resemble the cat who ate the canary whenever I smile. If I am not enough to replace your entire world, will the lover you find here be able to understand the terms of endearment you utter in a relearned language, be able to understand the place that taught you what love is, and how very important it is to you?

I don't believe people from one city must marry people from the same city and give birth to the next "pure-blooded" generation, and what's more, if you don't come, you may not even be able to utter the sincerest terms of endearment as you'd like. I just can't bear to see you sink into the loneliness that your mother tongue means nothing to those around you, far away from so many people who share the same language, sentenced to a lifetime of exile. I thought that in the end, I'd be the one who'd cross the ocean to return to you, surrounded by people we grew up with who speak the same language and listen to the same jokes, spouting off the same clichés we've heard over and over. I'd laugh at you for continuing to bundle up like a steamed cake

on top while baring your legs like grass jelly below, regardless of the weather, pairing a long-sleeved oversized sweater with a miniskirt. Year after year, we'd watch swimsuit-clad Miss Hong Kong contestants answer questions posed by veteran hosts and rudely nitpick the appearances of those women who dream of becoming stars. Each year we could also line up to squeeze into the book fair and see ghostwritten celebrity books sell like hotcakes. I'd listen to you lament once more that everyone says the city is a cultural desert, when obviously there are numerous outstanding authors and international award-winning poets, as well as stage plays deserving of more attention whose ticket prices are much cheaper than foreign productions, and I'd agree, disappointed that you'd been let down. At least where you are, our mother tongue is alive and well, enabling us to be hypercritical, because there, our mother tongue is a matter of course, rather than a minority language that needs to be painstakingly preserved, encouraged to be used, and legally protected. Our mother tongue is the majority in the place where our mother tongue is produced, and we are the clear majority in the place where we were born. Then if you really proposed marriage to me at that time, it wouldn't be because you wanted to escape, but because you wanted to stay and plant something, grow something—we could grow long-term and socially beneficial careers, offspring who love learning, and even art that moves others, enjoying our golden years with all the old people in the city. And between the two of us, we'd no longer need the city's trials and tribulations to make you consider staying with me.

Many, many words bubble up on the tip of my tongue, then gently burst and dissipate before being spat out. My dearest, compared to the city where you live, the city where I currently reside may be a stone building that won't topple in the foreseeable future, but can the scenery here really make you happy? My dear, my dear, how on earth can I use the gentlest and most graceful words to tell you I predict that over here you'll encounter a tonguelessness that will starve you of oxygen? I find myself speechless. And so, please say something. Keep on speaking, speak to your heart's content. Like artificial respiration, like blowing smoke rings. Like a living person, keep on speaking.

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林葉的街區（節錄）

/ excerpt from “Lam Yip’s Neighborhood”

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

(一) 數字店

林葉上下課時總愛經過有外星人賣的那條街，和總浮在櫥窗左邊的外星人打個招呼；牠從來不回應，雖然牠不像身邊的那些雞身或鴨身般被煮成豉油色或燒鴨色販售，牠始終是街上眾多的商品之一，於是牠一直沉默，對路過的媽媽們或工人姐姐們展示牠渾身的鮮橙色和所有的觸手，等待哪個嗜吃外星人的人把牠裝進發泡膠盒裡買走。

那是街上最受歡迎的店之一，林葉每次經過那裡都會看見一兩個人站在門前，邊看著櫥窗裡的大叔用比林葉的大腿更闊的刀子表演砍燒肉，邊等待櫥窗外的大叔把凍可樂和薑茸放進裝著發泡膠盒的透薄膠袋裡。沒有什麼比驚險的表演更能吸引顧客了：街頭的薄餅店櫥窗裡有大哥哥在表演拋麵團，街尾的麥記有大姐姐表演炸薯條，街中間的台式飲品店有位媽媽表演為飲品杯封上膠蓋，再把整杯飲料上下顛倒搖晃幾下，證明那已經變成一杯即使裝進太空船裡也不會翻濺的神奇珍珠奶茶，才讓顧客拿吸管親手把膠蓋刺穿。林葉最喜歡看這條街上的各種表演了，從街頭走到街尾就像參加過嘉年華會一樣精彩刺激；有時候他甚至會特地早點出門，就是為了要等馬路口的麵包店大叔赤裸著上身把一個又一個裝滿新鮮麵包的燙熱烤盤搬到店面，然後從這些雜技烤盤中夾出一個又一個金黃色的菠蘿包裝進林葉的或媽媽們的膠袋裡。那些菠蘿包吃起來總有馬戲團的味道。

林阿母的工作也需要表演：她是高級超級市場裡的蔬果包裝員，每天都得戴著墨綠色的紙帽站在蔬果區裡表演把奇形怪狀的火龍果或羅馬生菜用保鮮紙包得天衣無縫，像替蔬果均勻的沾上糖

衣，讓高貴的客人以高貴的價錢把它們帶走。林阿母說有時候會有高貴的小孩子站在蔬果區前面看著林阿母手中赤裸的薯仔或洋蔥，像是看見了赤裸的女人或男人一樣好奇，拉著他們高貴的母親或工人姐姐的手說他們也想像林阿母一樣徒手把薯仔或洋蔥握在手中，那些高貴的母親或工人姐姐總會倒抽一口氣，用高貴的手把他們拉走，口中唸著「no, no, dirty, dirty」。林葉翻過字典，實在不明白林阿母的工作有何下流；雖然林葉也害怕薯仔身上沾著那層泥，可是林阿母說高級超級市場裡的蔬果都已經被蔬果清潔員拿去泡過澡，也就不會再「dirty」了啊。

林葉沒有林阿爸，因此他很尊重林阿母的工作；林阿母的手藝讓她能給林葉買顏色筆和潔白的麵包，林葉以有這麼一位有才華的媽媽為榮。他也很努力的想要學習一種才藝好讓他大學畢業以後也能像林阿母一樣以手藝養活自己和林阿母，只是每次他拿起保鮮紙學著包裹香蕉或蘋果時，林阿母總會笑著搖頭，把保鮮紙拿開，叫他去查英文故事書或練習畫畫或是學習煎西多士。那些是更高貴的才藝啊，林阿母說。你長大了以後要比我更厲害，所以不要加入我的行業啊，林阿母說。林葉點點頭。

林葉堅信才藝是重要的，因此有外星人賣的那條街上幾乎每間店裡都有獨特的表演，而沒有表演的店也就慢慢地撐不下去了。首先關店的是櫥窗玻璃總是很髒的鐘錶行，然後是門前只擺了好多拖鞋和白飯魚和黑皮鞋的鞋店；影印舖把自己擠向鋪位的右半邊，把左半邊讓給新來的店，可是擠著擠著影印舖最終還是枯萎了。新來的店就這樣佔據了整個鋪位；它的同行也佔據了鐘錶行和鞋店的舊位置，像自空氣中飄來的孢子般一夜間膨脹成傘形的蘑菇。然而讓林葉無法理解的是，這些新來的店櫥窗裡居然也沒有任何的表演。

那麼它們憑什麼把以前的店從充滿優秀表演的街上擠掉呢？林葉甚至連它們在賣什麼都不太知道；然而它們的櫥窗卻像外星人店的櫥窗一樣總能讓途人駐足，讓林葉為賣命演出的外星人感到不忿。新來的店們都把整個櫥窗當壁報板來用，從上而下從左至右一格又一格的從裡面貼滿的A4紙，幾乎把櫥窗密封，只留下每張紙之間一兩吋的像溝渠一樣的空隙讓人看見裡面還有店員在駐守。每張紙上都印有附近大廈的名字和好些林葉看不明白的形容詞，其中總會有兩組數字，那應該是某種對途人的數學挑戰吧；林葉看得出通常櫥窗一邊的紙上會是一個三或四位數和一個七位或八位數的組合，另一邊的紙上則是一個三或四位數和一個四位或五位數的組合，因為那涉及太大的數字（八位數總不常出現在小學生的數學功課裡吧）和林葉不太擅長心算的除數，於是他就沒有計算那些數字之間的比例其實是多少。有些停步在這種數字店前面的人會拿出紙筆來把考題抄下，有些人會拿走掛在櫥窗邊的傳單回家計算；林葉不怎麼喜歡數學，而且他本來就有做不完的數學功課，所以他才不會像那種大人一樣自找麻煩。

林葉在A4紙之間的縫隙觀察那間把涼茶店擠走了的數字店，看見了裡面有太多的椅子，便以為那是好客的店，讓客人可以坐著計算貼在櫥窗上的那些考題，可是店裡面往往店員們在電腦前面發呆，即使看見了林葉也只會面無表情或白他一眼後垂下視線，完全沒有演員或店員的專業意識。那些店員甚至會翹班：林葉不止一次看見那種店裡完全沒人，明明還是人來人往的午後，明明還是月曆中間黑色字體的日子，他們只要在門上掛上一個寫著「出外睇樓」和電話號碼的牌子就留下空店，消失於聚在街角抽煙的人群和開始下午茶特價時段的食店之中。

那到底算是怎麼樣的一種店啊？林葉想起被數字店擠走了的士多，年老的店主即使無法表演也特地養了一隻很大很大的金色唐狗來吸引顧客，牠總趴在門前的地上，林葉伸手去摸牠頭時牠的眼睛就會眯起來，懶洋洋的像士多裡的貨物一樣；被另一家數字店擠掉了的那間涼茶鋪裡有一隻長得像企鵝的貓和像恐龍的龜在青藍色磁磚地上爬來爬去，像在城市中的動物園分店一般，飼養可愛的動物讓牠們盡力的娛樂客人。而那些數字店裡穿西裝的店員們卻傲慢得決不表演任何才藝，甚至連魚都不養一盆，彷彿只要把數字和形容詞貼在櫥窗上，那些油墨和字詞就能讓路人們主動走進店裡把錢包掏空。明明又不是巫婆的店也不是馬會。他們憑什麼？

別的店都是憑血肉和技能存活下來，為什麼這些店單憑展覽數字和形容詞就能把別的店都擠掉呢？林葉在心裡大聲的問櫥窗裡的外星人，可是腦袋呈錐形的牠沒有回答。

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林葉的街區（節錄）

/ excerpt from “Lam Yip’s Neighborhood”

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

ONE: NUMBER SHOPS

On his way to and from school, Lam Yip likes walking down the street where aliens are sold, saying hello to the alien who always floats on the left side of the window; it never responds. Although it’s not cooked until soy sauce-colored or roast duck-colored like the neighboring bodies of the chickens and ducks for sale, it’s always been one of the many goods sold on the street, eternally silent, baring its bright orange body and all of its tentacles to the moms and domestic helpers who pass by, waiting for an alien eater to stuff it into a Styrofoam box and whisk it away.

This is one of the most popular shops on the street. Each time Lam Yip walks by, he sees one or two people standing in front of the door, watching the uncle in the display window performing the act of chopping roast meat with a cleaver that’s wider than Lam Yip’s thigh while waiting for the uncle outside the window to tuck frozen cola and ginger into a clear, flimsy plastic bag packed with a Styrofoam box. Nothing attracts customers more than thrilling performances: in the window of the pizza shop on the corner, a big brother performs the act of tossing dough; at the McDonald’s at the end of the street, a big sister performs the act of deep-frying French

fries; at the Taiwanese drink shop in the middle of the street, a mom performs the act of sealing a plastic lid onto a cup, then turns the entire cup upside-down and gives it a few shakes, proving it’s a magical bubble tea that won’t splash even if it’s loaded onto a spaceship, before letting customers personally pierce the plastic lid with a straw. Lam Yip loves watching the various performances on this street—walking from the street corner to the end of the street is as exciting as attending a carnival. Sometimes, he even makes it a point to set out early in order to wait for the bare-chested uncle from the bakery at the intersection to carry scorching hot sheet pan after scorching hot sheet pan teeming with fresh bread to the front of the store, plucking one golden pineapple bun after another from these acrobatic sheet pans and packing them into plastic bags for Lam Yip or the moms. Those pineapple buns always taste like a circus.

Lam Yip’s mother’s job also entails performing: she packages produce in a high-end supermarket. Every day, she has to wear a dark green paper hat and stand in the produce section, performing the act of seamlessly packaging odd-shaped dragon fruit or Romaine lettuce in plastic wrap, as though she’s frosting the produce with an even layer of icing, so that the noble customers can take them away at a noble price. Lam Yip’s mother says that sometimes, noble children stand in front of the produce section staring at the naked potatoes or onions in her hands, filled with the same sense of curiosity one might have looking at a naked woman or man, holding the hands of their noble mothers or domestic helpers, remarking that if, like Lam Yip’s mother, they wanted to hold potatoes or onions in their bare hands, those noble mothers

or domestic helpers would gasp and lead them away with their noble hands, repeating in English, “No, no, dirty, dirty.” Lam Yip flips through the dictionary—he really doesn’t understand what’s so dirty about his mother’s job. Although Lam Yip is afraid of the dirt coating the potatoes, his mother says that the produce in the high-end supermarket has already been washed by the produce cleaners, so it’s no longer “dirty.”

Lam Yip doesn’t have a dad, so he highly respects his mother’s job; his mother’s craft allows her to buy Lam Yip colored pens and pure white bread. Lam Yip is proud of having such a talented mom. He also earnestly wants to learn a special skill so that after he graduates from university, he can follow in his mother’s footsteps and use his craft to support himself and his mother. It’s just that whenever he picks up plastic wrap to learn how to package bananas or apples, his mother laughs and shakes her head, taking away the plastic wrap, urging him to go read an English storybook or practice drawing or learn how to fry Hong Kong-style French toast. Those are even nobler skills, she says. When you grow up, you want to be better than me, so don’t go into my line of work, she says. Lam Yip nods his head.

Lam Yip believes that it’s important to have a skill. Almost every shop on the alien-selling street puts on a unique performance, and the shops without any performances are slowly going out of business. The first shop to close was the watch and clock shop with the perpetually dirty windows, followed by the shoe shop that only set out numerous flip-flops, white rubber-soled canvas shoes, and black leather shoes in front of the door.

The photocopy shop squeezed itself to the right side of the store, ceding the left side to a new shop, but the photocopy shop kept getting squeezed out until it finally withered away. In this way, the new shop ended up taking over the entire space; its peer shops also took over the former locations of the clock and watch shop and shoe shop, resembling spores in the air that expanded overnight into an umbrella-shaped mushroom. But Lam Yip can’t wrap his head around the fact that there aren’t any performances in the windows of these new shops, either.

Then how did they succeed in squeezing out the previous shops on this street of exceptional performances? Lam Yip doesn’t even know what they’re selling; however, their windows always cause passersby to stop, just like the one in front of the shop that sells aliens, making Lam Yip feel indignant on behalf of the aliens who sacrifice their lives putting on performances. The new shops use the windows as notice boards, sheets of A4 paper stuck from top to bottom, left to right, practically sealing off the windows, leaving only one- or two-inch gaps between each sheet to reveal that there are salespeople stationed inside. The name of a nearby building and several adjectives that Lam Yip doesn’t understand are printed on each sheet of paper, and there are always two sets of numbers, which must pose some sort of math challenge to the people who walk by. Lam Yip can see that the paper on one side of the window usually bears a combination of three- or four-digit numbers and seven- or eight-digit numbers, and on the other side there is a combination of three- or four-digit numbers and four- or five-digit numbers—because there are too many large numbers involved (eight-digit numbers are rarely found in elementary

school students' math homework), and Lam Yip isn't very good at doing division in his head, he doesn't calculate the actual ratio between the two sets of numbers. Some adults who stop in front of these number stores take out a pen and paper and copy down these exam questions. Others take one of the flyers hanging from the window and do their calculations at home. Lam Yip isn't very fond of math, and he already has math homework that he can't finish, so unlike the adults, he doesn't go looking for trouble.

Through the gaps of the A4 paper, Lam Yip studies the number shop that squeezed out the herbal tea shop. Seeing so many chairs inside, it gives the impression of being a hospitable shop, allowing customers to sit and calculate the exam questions posted on the window, but the salespeople inside tend to stare blankly at computer screens—even if they catch a glimpse of Lam Yip, they'll only glance at him expressionlessly or with disdain and then lower their gaze, without any trace of the professional awareness of a performer or salesperson. The salespeople even skip work: on more than one occasion, Lam Yip has found this kind of shop completely empty, when it was clearly still an afternoon with people coming and going, clearly still a day marked in black font on the calendar. All they did was hang a sign on the door reading GONE TO AN OPEN HOUSE, along with a phone number, and then left the shop empty, disappearing into the crowds of people smoking on street corners and the restaurants that had started their afternoon tea specials.

What kind of shop is this, anyway? Lam Yip thinks of the store squeezed out by the number shop—although he was unable

to put on a performance, the old shopkeeper kept a big, big golden mutt for the purpose of drawing in customers. It'd always sprawl out on the ground in front of the door. When Lam Yip would reach to pet its head, it'd squint, as listless as the items in the store. The herbal tea shop that was squeezed out by another number shop had a penguin-like cat and dinosaur-like turtle that would crawl back and forth on the cyan tiled floor, resembling a branch of the zoo in the city center that kept cute animals who did their best to entertain customers. But the suit-clad staff in these number stores are too arrogant to perform any special skill. They can't even be bothered to keep a bowl of fish. It's as though as long as numbers and adjectives are stuck to the windows, the ink and words will lure passersby into their shops to empty out their wallets. Clearly, they aren't witch shops or jockey clubs. What do they do?

Other shops depend on flesh and blood and skills to survive—why are these shops, which only display numbers and adjectives, able to squeeze out the other ones? In a loud voice in his head, Lam Yip poses this question to the alien in the window, but the conical head doesn't respond.

English translation published in *Lam Yip's Neighborhood* (Hong Kong: Spicy Fish Cultural Productions, 2019).

Chinese original is the second-place winner in the fiction category of the 2016 Awards for Creative Writing in Chinese; included in Wong Yi's short story collection *The Four Seasons of Lam Yip*, Hong Kong: Culture Plus, 2019.

林葉的護身符

/ Lam Yip's Amulet

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

林葉活在一個比益力多更多菌的世界裡，而世界的菌並不如益力多菌般有益，而林葉亦不幸地比其他孩子都敏感於這樣的事實。特別是在小學廁所這種滿地體液的地方，像每層樓盡頭的細菌培養皿養著男生的汗水和鼻涕和嘔吐物和尿尿，連空氣裡也瀰漫著別人的體溫和皮屑和霧；在潮濕的日子那被灰白磁磚和粗糙小窗困起來的空間便彷彿變成一個注滿益力多的魚缸而那益力多曾被人用來漱口吐出來後閒置於太陽下三個月——林葉曾不止一次因此嘔吐在永遠濕滑的廁所地上並被迫換上校務處那套來歷不明的運動服，也不止一次因為忍著不想去廁所而尿褲子而再次被迫換上那套不知誰人穿過多少次的運動服直至林阿母從家裡趕來接他回家，回到家裡的時候林葉總會立刻用熱水澡把皮膚燙得發紅直至小浴室裡只有水蒸氣和肥皂的氣味直至只屬於林葉和林阿母的軟白毛巾熟悉而溫柔地包覆在微痛而乾燥的皮膚上，他才感覺自己可以再次自如地呼吸如回到淨水的魚。

於是林葉喜歡有口袋的褲子，因為他必須把他的護身符時刻帶在身上。他班上有些同學喜歡把去日本旅行時買來的護身符掛在書包上，精緻閃亮的布料常常繡著「學業御守」、「健康御守」，像向眾人炫耀旅行經歷的迷你許願寶碟；他問過同學護身符裡包著什麼，他們說如果偷看了就不會靈驗，但書包的主人考試排名也不一定變得比林葉更前、也不一定少請幾天病假。哼哼。林葉的護身符可是一定靈驗的，因為那可是林阿母教他的法術。

林葉聽同學們說在日本時需向自己所屬街區的神祇祈求保佑，彷彿神祇都如區議員般有著地域性的保佑權限；而林阿母和林葉都生於香港，於是她教林葉的法術也只於這城有效。她說，當林葉

因為廁所的氣味或空氣的濕度或貓沙盤或傷口或公共扶手或疫病的新聞而感到不安時，他可以向透明的物事禱告，比如梘液和酒精搓手液和消毒藥水或蒸餾水或針筒裡的疫苗，那些因為人工所以無菌的物事。林阿母並帶他到市政大廈裡看過那些透明的靈符，張貼在升降機的軌掣上、包裹著公共圖書館的畫冊、罩在濕淋淋的雨傘外，在那些本來沾滿細菌的物事四周張起結界保護這座不止一次被疫症洗劫的城。

而林葉相信林阿母，不只因為他總會相信他的母親：林阿母的工作正是要為城裡售賣的蔬菜貼上這樣的透明護符。這城的人和林葉一樣除了害怕其他市民的體溫和指紋，還害怕泥土，所以他們在樹根上鋪滿磚頭和石屎、企圖用樓宇把郊野公園和農地壓縮在地圖的邊緣，還聘請了許多如林阿母般的保鮮紙藝術家在超級市場裡把來自土地的食物逐一以工業用份量的保鮮紙緊緊包裹，讓重要的貴婦指尖不受危險的馬鈴薯和馬蹄威脅。

林葉記得他第一次看見林阿母工作時的極端恐慌。他拿著待簽的手冊在那光潔明亮的超級市場裡看見自己重要的母親穿著潔白的制服上衣和深綠色的圍裙，站在滿室的蕃薯和蘿蔔和紅菜頭之間，只以紙帽和膠口罩和手套保護著就得和面前的球根類蔬菜共處一整天——他趴在地上把早上吃的火腿通粉和炒蛋多士都吐到冰凍的地上，林阿母跑過來扶起他時來不及脫掉手套，林葉見了又再次滑倒，大腿內側忽然感到一陣溫熱，他哭著坐著踢著腳把自己自母親身邊往後撐開，其他的超市職員們也自各自的攤位後跑來包圍著林葉，意大利風乾火腿攤的大叔魚生櫃的男生排水果的大媽和撈斑點蝦的阿姨戴著沾滿各種或乾或濕的穢物的手套迫

近，林葉想叫喊卻又叫不出聲來，他以為他的母親如其他同學的母親一樣在玻璃幕牆的辦公大廈裡做著高貴而乾淨的文職、那裡的燈光理應慘白那裡的空氣應該乾燥並每日有人清潔地板兩次；他弱小的肋骨定格鼻腔凝固腦袋也凝固，當他回過神來時他身下已不再是沾滿尿尿的地板而是急症室的病床，好像有誰在他的大腿上打了枝針，林阿母坐在床邊緊握著他的手，溫熱而熟悉的掌心和四周的慘白色讓林葉的胸腔再次安然地起伏。

而對後來林葉的指控林阿母嚴肅地說，我並非在從事什麼低賤而污穢的工作。不管是包裝蔬菜的人或是神職人員都需要穿制服，醫生和理貨員都一樣得戴手套；最重要的是，保鮮紙可是能讓一切物事保持乾淨的靈符，在這樣的情況下，林阿母不但需要確保自身一直整潔，還能保佑她服侍的人們不受食物表面的泥土威脅，那不是和牧師或護士一樣重要的工作嗎？在林葉床邊提著一桶消毒藥水和地拖走過的清潔工姨姨聽了默默的點頭，林葉聞著那讓他安心的氣味冷靜了下來。是的。那確實是種勇敢而偉大的工作，如消防員或倒垃圾的人；而林阿母大概就是某種主理蔬果的巫女，專門負責把保佑世人的保鮮紙鎮壓在蓮藕和栗子之上。

林葉坐起來，緊緊抱住林阿母。你真是個勇敢而偉大的人呢，他說。而林阿母和清潔工姨姨一起苦笑。在那以後林葉便徹底明白林阿母的工作性質，並學會了她的小小法術以便在這座污穢危險的城裡抱持平安和喜樂並不再尿褲子——林葉在林阿母午睡時偷偷穿上她的全套工作服，洗過手再用酒精抹過再戴上手套和口罩，然後撕下一段保鮮紙層層緊纏包裹成一瓣蒜頭的形狀，裝進小小的密實袋裡再裝進小小的布袋裡，像一個小小的健康御守或

是面對可能出現的殭屍時預先準備好的護符。於是如果有變態佬從學校廁格的上方俯視林葉，他會看見林葉緊握著那個小小的布袋彷彿那是除去廁所惡臭的香包或不能掉進馬桶的電話：世界髒亂，但那小口袋裡裝著能讓一切變得光潔無菌的靈符，就算只有林葉知道，那霧亦必退散。

原文選自：黃怡，《林葉的四季》。香港：文化工房，2019。

林葉的護身符

/ Lam Yip's Amulet

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

Lam Yip lives in a world teeming with more bacteria than Yakult, but the world's bacteria isn't as beneficial as Yakult's, and unfortunately, Lam Yip is more sensitive to this fact than any other child. This is especially true in places full of bodily fluids, such as elementary school bathrooms, which are like petri dishes at the end of each floor, cultivating boys' sweat, snot, vomit, and urine—even the air is suffused with other people's body heat and dander and fog. On humid days, the space trapped by grey-white tiles and small crude windows turns into a fish tank brimming with Yakult that has been gargled and spat out, then left to sit in the sun for three months. On more than one occasion, Lam Yip has vomited onto the perpetually slippery floor, forced to change into a tracksuit of unknown origin from the school office, and also on more than one occasion, he has peed his pants because he didn't want to go to the bathroom, yet again forced to change into the tracksuit worn by who-knows-who for how many times until his mom picked him up and brought him home. Upon arriving home, the first thing Lam Yip always does is take a hot bath that scalds his skin red until the small bathroom only smells of steam and soap, and it is only after the soft white towel belonging to Lam Yip and his mother familiarly and gently cocoons his slightly aching, dry skin, that he can breathe freely again, like a fish returned to clean water.

And so, Lam Yip prefers pants with pockets, because he must keep his protective charm on him at all times. Some of his classmates like to hang protective charms bought on trips to Japan on their schoolbags, the exquisite and shiny fabrics often embroidered with phrases such as “academic amulet” or “health amulet,” like a mini wishing tree flaunting their travel experiences. He asks his classmates what's wrapped inside the charms. They claim their charms would lose their efficacy if they peeked inside, but the owners of these schoolbags don't necessarily score higher than Lam Yip on exams or take fewer sick days. Hmph. Lam Yip's protective charm is definitely effective, because it contains magic his mother taught him.

Lam Yip heard his classmates say that in Japan, you have to pray to your specific neighborhood god for a blessing, as though gods have regional powers like district councilors; both Lam Yip and his mother were born in Hong Kong, so the magic she taught him only works in this city. She says that whenever Lam Yip feels uneasy because of bathroom smells or humidity in the air or cat litter boxes or wounds or public handrails or news of epidemics, he can pray to transparent substances like liquid soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, disinfectant, distilled water, or vaccines in syringes, things that are artificially sterile. Lam Yip's mother also takes him to the municipal services building to view these transparent talismans: placed on lift buttons, wrapped around picture albums from the public library, sheathing wet umbrellas, constructing a barrier around germ-infested objects to protect this city that has been ravaged by epidemics more than once.

Lam Yip trusts her, and not just because he always trusts his mother—her job is to stick these kinds of transparent charms on vegetables sold in the city. Like Lam Yip, the people in this city are not only afraid of other citizens' body heat and fingerprints, but also dirt, so they cover tree roots with bricks and concrete, attempting to use buildings to squeeze country parks and farmland to the outskirts of the map, as well as hiring numerous plastic wrap artists such as Lam Yip's mother to work in the supermarkets, where they use industrial-sized plastic wrap to tightly wrap the food from the earth, safeguarding important ladies' fingertips from the perils of potatoes and water chestnuts.

Lam Yip recalls the extreme panic he felt the first time he saw his mother at work. Inside the bright gleaming supermarket, holding the student handbook he was waiting for her to sign, he saw his own important mother dressed in a pristine white uniform jacket and dark green apron, standing in a room full of sweet potatoes, radishes, and beetroots, protected only by a paper hat, plastic mask, and gloves, spending the entire day with the bulbous vegetables in front of her. He fell to his hands and knees, vomiting that morning's ham and macaroni soup and scrambled eggs with toast onto the freezing cold floor. His mother had no time to take off her gloves when she ran to pick him up. Upon seeing this, Lam Yip slipped again, feeling a sudden warmth in his inner thighs, wailing as he sat kicking himself away from his mother. Other supermarket staff also dashed out from their respective stalls and surrounded Lam Yip, approaching with gloves stained with various kinds of wet and dry filth: the uncle from the Italian dried ham stall, the boy from the sashimi counter, the elderly auntie arranging

the fruit display, the auntie who scoops up spotted prawns. Lam Yip wanted to scream, but he couldn't utter a sound. He'd assumed that his mother, like his classmates' mothers, was a noble and clean desk worker in a glass-walled office building, where the lights should be dim, the air should be dry, and the floors should be cleaned twice a day. His puny ribs froze, his nose froze, and his head froze. When he came to his senses, he was no longer on a pee-soaked floor but in an emergency room bed, and it seemed that someone had stuck a needle in his thigh. Lam Yip's mother sat by his bedside clutching his hand, the warm and familiar palm and pale white surroundings making Lam Yip's chest peacefully rise and fall.

In response to Lam Yip's subsequent accusation, his mother solemnly said, I'm not doing some menial, dirty job. Both vegetable packers and clergy are required to wear uniforms, and doctors and tally clerks alike must wear gloves; most importantly, plastic wrap is a talisman that keeps everything clean. Given these circumstances, Lam Yip's mother must not only ensure that she is always clean and tidy, but she must also protect the people she serves from the dirt on the surface of their food—isn't this as important a job as a pastor or a nurse? The cleaning auntie carrying a mop and bucket of disinfectant past Lam Yip's bed listened, silently nodding. Lam Yip calmed down at the reassuring scent. Yes. It was truly a brave and great job, like being a firefighter or a sanitation worker. Lam Yip's mother might very well be some sort of witch in charge of produce, responsible for suppressing lotus roots and chestnuts with the plastic wrap that blesses and protects the world.

Lam Yip sat up, fiercely hugging his mother. You're a brave and great person, he said. Lam Yip's mother and the cleaning auntie smiled wryly. After that, Lam Yip fully understood the nature of his mother's job, and learned a little magic from her to stay safe and happy in this filthy and dangerous city, as well as to stop wetting his pants. While his mother took an afternoon nap, Lam Yip secretly donned her work uniform, washed his hands, wiped them with alcohol, and put on gloves and a mask, then tore off a piece of plastic wrap, tightly rolling layer after layer into the shape of a garlic clove, which he tucked into a small plastic storage baggie, which he then tucked into a small cloth bag, like a little health amulet or charm at the ready for warding off potential zombies. And so, if a pervert were to peer down at Lam Yip from above the school bathroom stall, he would see Lam Yip clutching the small cloth bag as though it were a sachet to get rid of the stench of the toilet, or a phone that mustn't be dropped into the toilet bowl below—the world is messy, but that little pocket holds the talisman that makes everything clean and sterile. Even if Lam Yip is the only one who knows, the fog will dissipate.

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偷情碼頭

/ Secret Rendezvous Pier

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

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到早上就要把你還回去了。真不公平。可不可以把你據為己有呢。不止是今晚，一直都據為己有，好不好。丟掉你的婚戒，撕掉你身上的防盜貼紙，永遠不還給你老婆。今次沒有戴婚戒來嗎，真乖。沒有防盜貼紙可撕的話，先掀起上衣，讓我摸摸你的肚子吧。為什麼不行，這裡就算再多人，都不會有人看我們的。捏一下，捏一下嘛，哈哈，哈哈。

怎麼常常說我鹹濕，我問你，你知不知道「鹹濕」從哪裡來？從那些碼頭咕喱處來，搬完貨滿身臭汗就撲去妓院的猴擒咕喱，成身又鹹又濕。難得來到石塘咀，而且在碼頭，怎能不鹹濕一下你呢？喂喂不要擲我，不要不要，哈哈，不要啦，再擲我就要碌落海了，哈哈，哈哈，哈哈。

就這樣躺著也不錯呢。從酒店的窗也可以看見這個碼頭，這片海，可是來碼頭看，才最漂亮。海啊，雲啊，日落啊。那點閃著移動的光，應該不是星星，是飛機吧。對面海那片燈光裡，你老婆應該就在裡面某處，在娘家說著你的壞話。海為我們掩護，夜晚的黑為我們戴上面紗。誰也抓不到我們，也看不到我們，這裡連警察都不會進來巡邏。就算我們坐得再近岸邊，連浪都不能觸及我們。

地面好硬。這好像廢話，哈哈。可是，這不是陸地，是人類在海面上建出來的一座碼頭，居然會這麼堅固，我們這樣躺在地上，也完全不擔心它會動搖或是下沉。是不是有個成語叫什麼……啊，「海枯石爛」。真的會爛嗎，這樣堅固的碼頭。應該不會吧。

大家都說，每一個偷食的男人，都會說他們終有一日會和老婆離婚。可是我想相信你是例外地真的會這樣做的那一個。我想相信我們會一起養一隻狗，可以日光日白時一起拖著牠搭鞦韆樓，看更會叫我們做「劉生劉太」，我們可以一起看著狗在碼頭上跑向其他人的狗，看著在西面天空慢慢消失的鹹蛋黃。或是生一個仔也好，我還那麼後生，再等多幾年才生仔也可以。你的老婆，已經老得不可能再生仔了吧。那個性冷感的人。但我可以。

你沒有做錯，我也沒有做錯。到這個公眾貨物裝卸區來散步、放狗、跳大媽舞，其實都是犯法的啊，人們還不是每天都來。而且通姦又不犯法，你情我願，我沒什麼好怕的。頂多就是她知道我們在一起後，終於和你離婚。要是沒有我來做醜人，她又怎會承認你對她已經沒有愛呢。她知道也好，不知道也好，無論如何我們都會繼續在一起，不是嗎？

怎麼忽然變得安靜呢。你在想什麼呢，我感應不到你的腦電波。我只聽到你的呼吸聲，和海浪聲，和那班韓國大學生圍圈喝酒喧鬧的聲音。有星星啊今晚，這裡一粒，你看那裡又有一粒，平常在市區，很難看見這麼大片的天空，那麼多的星星呢。告訴你一個秘密吧，我從來沒有帶過其他男生來這裡看星星呢，只有你。我的舊同學、同事，全部都是九龍人、新界人，很少過來西環這邊，隔著維港，他們不可能看得見我。我和你在一起的秘密，不會傳到那邊。你看，我多麼識相，和你老婆不一樣吧。

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「鹹濕」嗎。之前那個卸膊王被老婆捉姦捉到上公司時，我們成班男人還一直笑他衰鹹濕、搞到連份工都無埋，也許我們其實只是在笑他蠢，居然被抓到而已。

「鹹濕」的來源，我們這年紀的人，怎會沒聽過呢。是她這種後生女，才覺得很新奇吧。不過，也好。有時候面對細路女，還是需要裝裝傻才好。有時卻反而要認叻，像是北斗星，我原本哪知那在神話裡叫做大熊座，在旁邊還有一隻小熊座，但以前那個女孩喜歡星星，跟我說過，我再告訴 Jessie，她就覺得我很博學。其實也不過是，和上一任女友分手後，拿她告訴我的故事拿來哄現任女友，那樣卑鄙的所為。

以前那個女孩跟我說大熊座的故事時，我們也是在這個碼頭一起看星。她們這種年紀的年輕人，都很喜歡這種隱世景點、偷情勝地，其實世上哪有那麼多秘密，她們自己也知道這個碼頭已經被捧為所謂的「Instagram pier」，人們為了拍照慕名而來，已經變成某種陳腔濫調。連廣告公司都會來取景的地方，到底能有多隱世呢。不過她們都覺得這是對她們來說重要的秘密，覺得和我分享這個秘密景點是嚴肅的承諾，我就交足戲，假裝她是第一個帶我來這裡的人，假裝我第一次被廣闊的海和天空震懾，假裝我不曾在這裡和別人不顧一切地躺在地上，摟抱住說不著邊際的情話，並為她脫鞋、放在旁邊，預先脫掉我的婚戒，讓她的腳、我的手可以無所顧慮地垂在海上，讓她感覺受寵愛得無論如何都無法恨我太深。她們都喜歡這種把戲。我是個多麼，多麼卑鄙的人。

Jessie 是個好女孩。她會聽我說任何的話：關於那些我仍然無法接受的世事，她不會像我老婆那樣，叫我做人要睇開啲，而是會陪

我一起黝，一起無用地黝。她不覺得我活到現在仍談不上成功或穩重，而是成熟得無論如何都有三斤釘的大船，沒有和她同齡的男子那種容易被世界搖撼的輕浮。她看我的時候，摸我的時候，有一種我好久沒見過的好奇與訝異。她和我老婆一樣是雙眼皮，圓圓胖胖的上眼瞼，飽滿細緻的臉頰，扁平緊實的肚皮。和老婆以前一樣青春。老婆從未有過的甜美酒窩。

以前和老婆還會拖手時，比較容易近看她的臉。現在每晚背向對方入睡，已成形多年的舒適默契。但和這個女孩像這樣面對面抱緊、激烈地打鬧，卻仍然是那麼有趣。什麼時候開始，老婆失去了和我一起打鬧的興趣呢。對她說不出口的話，那些女孩們卻很喜歡聽，關於大熊座和小熊座的傳說，海面漂浮垃圾的來源，石塘咀以前作為石礦場和進出口貨運碼頭的歷史，卸膊王那次跌了我一鑊、至今我仍然懷恨在心的事。總覺得，老婆更想聽別人說的話，來自 YouTube，來自主婦朋友，來自女同事，來自親戚，不包括我。但她願意和我同住一室，把我們的襪子和內褲放進同一部洗衣機，煮我吃慣的薯仔炆排骨，在洗完碗、倒完垃圾、洗完澡以後，願意抱著手機背著我，填滿她那一邊床。我一直想要的細水長流，只是比我想像中早了二十年到達這種無法起浪的淡然。

有些事情，能不打擾她，就不打擾她；她不知道的事，不會傷害她。我很小心，沒有讓以前那個女孩懷孕或恨我，她在找到比我更好的男人以後和我分手，也沒有讓我老婆知道。Jessie 像極新婚時的我妻，對於我的身體，我的故事，她全部都想探索；我一直想念的親密和激情，她都能代替填補。但要是她真的像我妻一樣，想成為我的老婆，我該怎麼辦呢。那時，有什麼方法可以把她擋住呢。在海邊想事情，總感覺比較澄明，但目前腦內，仍暗得伸手不見五指。

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你記得這個水窪嗎？三年前我們第一次一起來這裡，你幫我拍過一張用它當「天空之鏡」的照片。當然這已經不是三年前那灘水，但能積水的凹陷地面，以及我們，還是一樣。只要最終能有亮光，誰來讓這個凹陷變成明鏡，也無所謂吧，對不對。

沿著岸邊往西面走到盡頭，去堅尼地城吃糖水吧。來到這邊，已經聽不見那邊那圈吵鬧的韓國大學生，也聽不見那些大媽播放的廣場舞音樂了。我們走了多遠？五十米？五百米？一分鐘？半個鐘？三日兩夜，假裝和姐姐去的台北之旅？走了那麼遠，我們還是在同一個地方。世界原來真是有那麼大，我記得那時在台北，你第一次看見我裸身時，我發現我再次感覺到害羞，一種在婚後幾乎不再遇見的情緒。我記得我看著自己袒露的肚臍和下腹，多麼陌生，我多久沒有看見過自己的身體，那個不知道怎樣再自如地袒露在丈夫面前的身體。你環抱我入懷的時候問我有沒有想清楚。反正我們都不打算離婚，也絕對不會一起生子，那些在自己的床上加諸自己的壓力，在你面前，全部失去法力。在你身上，我再次尋回還未確定自己不孕、不會在丈夫面前照見一切缺失的，那個無憂無慮的，那麼懂得愉悅的身體。我好像變了一個新造的人。

看我們的影子，難道我們不登對嗎。沒有人會懷疑我們不是一對飯後到樓下散步健身的沉悶中年夫婦，這裡的燈光昏黃如霧，不會有人知道我不是你太太。所有人正沿著沒有欄杆的碼頭岸邊一字排開、把視線定在沒有人臉的海裡或天空裡，對面的九龍半島，在海港的另一邊變成遙遠的他方。我丈夫不會知道我說回娘家是指回我們一起讀大學時住的地區而不是我出嫁前住的那個家，他大概早已忘記我跟他說過的一切年輕往事，但當我用那些

故事來交換你的故事，我便彷彿重新有了影子，變得實在起來。能不時在外面做回自己，回去家中當我的劉太、當你的一家之主的時候，就更甘心、更平靜，更容易到達海枯石爛，不是嗎？

咦，原來你耳朵的形狀那麼有趣。我可以量度一下它可以承載幾個吻嗎？喂，我在測量很重要的事情，你的嘴唇卻干擾我的儀器運作，既然如此，我只好先量度一下你的嘴唇，再測試一下你酒窩的味道了。答應我，不能帶其他情人來這裡看海，這裡總堆疊成小山的搭棚竹、不知要轉運到哪裡建什麼樓房的大批磚頭，不止是文青們慕名來拍照的背景，更是我們的見證人。你要知道，我現在只會為你而呷醋了。我們來勾手指尾。如果你破壞承諾，我一定會擲你擲到你跪地求饒。要來體驗一下嗎？哈哈，哈哈，我就是喜歡看你怕擲的樣子，當你笑起來，你的酒窩好深，好甜。你知道嗎，讓人長出酒窩的基因是顯性的，你太太沒有酒窩，Jessie 的酒窩卻那麼深，一定是你遺傳給她的。你有一個沒有給你戴綠帽的好老婆呢。一點也不像我。

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偷情碼頭

/ Secret Rendezvous Pier

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

* * *

I'll have you back in the morning. It's so unfair. Can I make you mine? Not just tonight, but for always, okay? Throw away your wedding ring, tear off the anti-theft sticker on your body—I'm never giving you back to your wife. You're not wearing a wedding ring this time? Such a good boy. Since there's no anti-theft sticker to tear off, lift up your shirt and let me touch your belly. Why not? There are so many people here—no one will notice us. C'mon, just a little pinch, a little pinch, haha, hahaha.

Why do you always say I'm "salty and wet?" Do you know where this euphemism for lewd originates from? It comes from those pier coolies—after transporting goods, those horny coolies rushed to the brothels covered in stinky sweat, their bodies salty and wet. When you come to Shek Tong Tsui, especially the pier, how could you not get all salty and wet? Hey, hey, don't tickle me, don't, don't, hahaha, don't! If you keep it up, I'm going to roll into the sea, haha, haha, hahaha.

How nice it is to just lie here like this. The pier and the sea are also visible from hotel windows, but the view is most beautiful from the actual pier itself. The sea, the clouds, the sunset. That

flickering light isn't a star but a plane. Your wife should be inside somewhere among the lights across the sea, badmouthing you in her mother's home. The sea cloaks us, and the darkness of the night conceals us like a veil. No one can catch us or see us—even the police don't patrol around here. Even if we scoot closer to the edge, the waves can't touch us.

The ground is so hard. This sounds like nonsense, haha. This isn't land, but a human-made pier on the sea. It's so sturdy that we can lie on the ground like this without worrying it'll shake or sink. How does that idiom go?...Oh right: "Even if the seas run dry and the rocks crumble." Can such a sturdy pier really crumble? It shouldn't.

People say that every man who secretly snacks on the side claims he'll divorce his wife one day. However, I want to believe that you are the exception who will really go through with it. I want to believe we'll raise a dog that we can take on the elevator downstairs in broad daylight, and the security guard will greet us as "Mr. and Mrs. Lau." We can watch the dog run over to other people's dogs on the pier, watch the salted egg yolk sun slowly disappear in the western sky. Or have a baby. I'm still young—I can wait a few more years. Your wife is already too old to have any. That frigid person. But I can.

You've done nothing wrong, nor have I. In this public cargo working area, it's actually illegal to go for a stroll, walk the dog, or for elderly aunties to dance in large groups, but don't people still come here day after day? And adultery isn't against the law—as long as we're both willing, I have nothing to fear. At most, she'll

finally divorce you after finding out we're together. If I wasn't here to be the bad guy, then how would she be able to admit that you no longer love her? Whether she finds out or not, we'll stay together no matter what, right?

Why are you suddenly so quiet? What're you thinking? I can't sense your brain waves. I can only hear your breathing, the crashing of waves, and the raucousness of that group of Korean university students getting drunk. Oh, the stars are out tonight. One here, and look, another one over there. Usually in the city it's hard to see such a large stretch of sky and so many stars. I'll let you in on a secret: I've never brought any other guy here to gaze at the stars, only you. My old classmates and coworkers are all from Kowloon and the New Territories—they hardly ever come over to Sai Wan. They can't see me across Victoria Harbour. The secret of us being together won't spread over there. See how sensible I am, unlike your wife.

* * *

"Salty and wet?" Back in the day, when the wife of the king of shirking responsibility caught him cheating at the office, we guys kept laughing at how he screwed up by being too lewd, which ended up costing him his job. Maybe we were just laughing at him for being stupid enough to get caught.

At our age, how could we not have heard the origins of "salty and wet?" Only a young thing like her would find it novel. However, it's fine. Sometimes you have to play dumb in front of a little girl. But at other times, you want to be show-off, like with

the Big Dipper—who'd have thought it was called Ursa Major in mythology, and that Ursa Minor was next to it? But the previous girl who loved stars told me that, and when I repeated it to Jessie, she thought I was so knowledgeable. The truth is, it's simply that after I broke up with my last girlfriend, I used her stories to win over my current one, the sort of shameless thing one does.

When that other girl told me about Ursa Major, we were also looking at stars on this very pier. Young people their age all love this kind of hidden gem, a popular spot for a secret rendezvous. In fact, how can there be so many secrets in this world? They themselves are well-aware that this pier is touted as the so-called "Instagram pier," and it's already become a cliché for people to take pictures here. How can a place be hidden when even advertising companies come here to shoot? But they all feel this is an important secret, feel that sharing this secret gem with me shows a serious commitment. I play along, pretending she's the first girl who's brought me here, pretending to be amazed by the vastness of the sea and the sky for the first time, pretending I've never recklessly lain here on the ground with someone else, snuggling and murmuring meaningless terms of endearment, taking off my wedding ring beforehand, letting her feet and my hands dangle over the sea without any concern, making her feel so adored that she can't hate me too much no matter what. They all fall for this trick, hook, line, and sinker. What a shameless, shameless person I am!

Jessie's a good girl. She'll listen to anything I say—when it comes to things in the world that I still have trouble accepting, she's not like my wife, telling me to let them go and focus on the big

picture; instead, she joins me in my anger, the two of us angry in vain. She doesn't think I'm unsuccessful or unstable, but rather that I'm mature enough to know the ropes, even if I can't tie them as fast as I used to, with none of the frivolity of men her age who are easily shaken by the world. Whenever she looks at me or touches me, there's a sort of curiosity and amazement I haven't seen in a long time. Like my wife, she has double eyelids, full upper eyelids, plump, delicate cheeks, and a flat, tight belly. As young as my wife used to be. Sweet dimples that my wife has never had.

Back when my wife and I still held hands, it was easier to get a good look at her face. Now, we sleep with our backs to each other every night, having settled into a comfortable tacit understanding over the years. But being face-to-face with this girl in this way, hugging her tightly and fiercely roughhousing, is also so much fun. Since when did my wife lose interest in roughhousing with me? Those girls love hearing those words I can't say to her: the legends of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, the source of the floating garbage on the sea, Shek Tong Tsui's history as a quarry and import and export cargo port, the time the king of shirking responsibility wronged me; to this day, I still hold a grudge. I always have the sense that my wife is more interested in listening to what other people have to say—YouTube, housewife friends, female coworkers, relatives—than in listening to me. But she's willing to share a room with me, put our socks and underwear in the same washing machine, and cook the braised ribs and potatoes that I love. After washing the dishes, taking out the trash, and taking a bath, she's willing to fill the space on her side of the bed, clutching her phone with her back turned to me. The calm waters I've always wanted, but arriving at these waves of indifference twenty years earlier than expected.

There are some things better left unsaid; what she doesn't know won't hurt her. I was very careful not to let the last girl get knocked up or make her hate me. She broke up with me after finding a man better than me, and didn't let my wife know. Like my wife when we were newlyweds, Jessie is eager to explore everything about my body and my stories. She can fulfill the intimacy and passion I've been missing. But what should I do if, like my wife, she really wants to become my wife? At that point, there won't be any way to stop her. Thinking things over by the sea always makes them seem clearer, but right now, in my mind, it's still too dark to see the hand in front of me.

* * *

Do you still remember this puddle? When we first came here three years ago, you took a picture of me, using it to create a "mirror of the sky" effect. Of course, this isn't the same pool of water from three years ago, but this water-accumulating pothole is still the same, as are the two of us. As long as there is eventually light, it doesn't matter who turns this pothole into a bright mirror, right?

Let's follow the edge of the water to the very end and head to Kennedy Town for tong sui dessert soup. Over here, I can no longer hear that group of noisy Korean university students, or the music of those elderly aunties dancing in the square. How far have we walked? Fifty meters? Five hundred meters? One minute? Half an hour? Three days and two nights, pretending to go on a trip to Taipei with my sister? After walking so far, we're still in the same place. The world is really so big. I remember how I found myself

feeling shy again when you saw me naked for the first time in Taipei, a feeling I almost never encountered after getting married. I remember gazing at my bare belly button and lower abdomen, how unfamiliar they were—it'd been so long since I'd seen my body, the body that I didn't know how to freely reveal to my husband. As you hold me in your arms, you ask me whether I've thought things through. Anyway, we're not planning on divorcing our spouses, and we'll never have children together. The pressure I put on myself in my own bed loses all its supernatural power in front of you. In you, I once again find my carefree body that knows pleasure, that isn't fixated on its barrenness, that doesn't see everything that's missing in front of my husband. It's as though I'm reborn.

Look at our shadows—aren't we a perfect match? No one will suspect we're not a boring middle-aged couple gone downstairs for an after-dinner walk. The streetlights here are dim like fog; no one knows I'm not your wife. The people are all lined up along the unbalustrated edge of the pier, gazes fixed on the faceless sea or sky. Kowloon Peninsula on the other side of the harbor is now a faraway place. My husband won't know that when I said I was going back home, I meant back to the area where we lived while we were in university, not the home I lived in before I got married. He's probably forgotten everything I told him from my youth, but when I trade those stories with yours, it's as though I've regained my shadow, becoming real. The ability to be ourselves outside from time to time, then returning home, where I assume the role of Mrs. Lau, and you the role of the head of the family, keeps us content and calm, makes it easier to stay with our spouses until “the seas run dry and the rocks crumble,” right?

Wow, the shape of your ear is so interesting! May I measure how many kisses it can hold? Hey, I'm measuring something important, and your lips are interfering with the operation of my instrument, so first I'm going to have to measure your lips, and then test the taste of your dimples. Promise me you won't bring other lovers here to look at the sea. Here, stacked into small hills, there are always pieces of scaffolding bamboo and enormous amounts of bricks that will be shipped off somewhere to construct buildings; more than just the backdrop for members of the young artsy crowd who come to take photos, they're also our witnesses. You know, right now, you're the only person who can make me feel jealous. Let's pinky swear. If you break your promise, I'll tickle you until you're on your knees, begging for mercy. Would you like to test it out? Haha, hahaha, I just like watching you be afraid of being tickled—when you laugh, your dimples are so deep and sweet. You know, the gene for dimples is dominant. Your wife doesn't have dimples, but Jessie's dimples are so deep. She must've inherited them from you. You have a good wife who isn't cheating on you. Not one bit like me.

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石頭魚

/ **Rockfish**

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

客較壞了，於是我們坐貨較落樓食飯。全部九個人，裝在限重2000公斤或26人的貨較裡，大家自然散開，剛好像較口的舞台劇海報裡演員排開合照的人口密度。出生以來從沒肥過的花枝看著限重告示說，這部貨較假設每個人差不多77公斤重，怎麼會有廿幾個這麼重的人一起在工業大廈搭較啊，難道樓上租了出去開相撲館嗎。阿鵬聽了就說，咩啊，男人老狗七十幾公斤有幾出奇呢？一眾男編輯們應聲附和，女編輯們多數表情困擾。河馬接著說，同埋西西話「我的憂愁不應該超過四十四磅重」¹ 嘛，即是一個人能承載的煩惱極限是20公斤，一個滿懷心事的阿石已經超過77公斤啦。你心算咁快嘅，花枝說。我以前讀純數嘍嘛，河馬說。我心諗，嘩，河馬到底是怎樣猜到我的體重，做 gym 的人果然有雙能當磅用的眼睛。

室外有一點點毛毛雨，在街燈之下，看起來癢癢的。浣熊說起上個星期沒來校對是因為她要去中學同學的婚禮，癡線，全部男仔都變晒保險佬，早知唔去啦。我一瞬間很想和大家說，我昨晚剛去過中學同學的喪禮，她自殺死了。今天天還未黑時我從鑽石山站走往編輯部，一路上逆著放工的密集人流，我又想起上個月另一個中學同學在婚宴上問，點解妳喺度嘅，彷彿我是白撞的。點解我喺度嘅，我在同學的靈堂裡也這樣問自己。我們甚至不是同年的同學，只是曾經在中學的校報委員會裡共事，我那時是過度前衛的美術編輯，她是因為中文科成績好而被老師踢進來幫手寫稿的低年級學生，我們甚至沒有直接對話過。但當我知道她的死訊，我居然自動把她喪禮時間撞期的講座邀約推卻，準時穿好黑衣到達靈堂，彷彿準時上學一樣自然。昨晚我從北角回來後我媽黑口黑面，問我，妳去果種地方做乜，佢又唔係熟人。是的，我和她並不熟。但我覺得，我是必須去的，她和我同類。我總

1. 西西〈長著鬍子的門神〉，《大拇指》第15期（1976年1月30日）。

覺得，可能只差一點，我也會像她一樣死去。

點解妳喺度嘅，在婚宴上，那個和我在同一地址、同一課室共處過七年的人對我說。要不是被迫，我才不想和她們當同學。新蒲崗的街道像深海的海床，凹凸不平、一岩一忽，流竄著各種和我同行或不同方向的腳步，以及從街邊竄出的蟑螂。甲甲啊，浣熊尖叫著，旋即飛跑到安全島上，在後面抽煙的海老和河童大叫，睇車啊妳。啊，我原來和一群也會把蟑螂叫做「甲甲」² 的人在一起。點解我會喺度嘅。毛毛雨好像稍為變大，河馬把風衣的帽子罩到頭上保護他最重要的髮型，我和河童對望偷笑。浣熊走在後面，問阿鵬今年在大學教幾科，阿鵬說教四科啊，不如一槍打爆我個頭。河童說，至少你有全職教席啊，我連畀教擔壓到斷頸嘅機會都無，你知道邊間院校有位記得關照吓我。橫街裡不少車房已經關門休息，大有街兩旁那些門口只有餐牌沒有招牌的工廈食堂門外，有個阿姐問我們幾多位埋便坐，毫不在乎我們是否有合法資格在內吃飯的樓上工廠職員。我們行開以後貓追上來說，阿石妳有無食過剛才果間，ok嘍。是嗎，是吃什麼的呢？我說。石九公湯，幾甜嘍。我說，其實我不喜歡吃石九公，哈哈。但妳叫阿石喎，哈哈，鵬說。你唔畀我係石頭魚個石咩，我說。石頭魚都得，不過妳似石斑多啲，他說。為什麼啊，我說。貴啲囉，名校底，他說。唔係靚啲咩，石頭魚好似中咗輻射咁，我說。咁梗係妳靚啲啦，他說。

阿石的石，到底是什麼呢。以前我常常在學校操場邊，一個人踢石栗。石栗總會在那裡，很高很高，每年開學後不久就結很多的果，果肉裡面像吹波膠那麼大、像石頭那麼硬的啡色種子，總有一些在秋天之後仍留在樹下，只要找一找，一定找得到的。我和

2. 謝曉虹〈甲甲〉，《好黑》，香港：青文書屋，2003。

同學們不一樣，她們用金耳環穿耳洞，留長長的頭髮，學芭蕾舞、小提琴、考鋼琴演奏級，像精緻光滑的水晶，和像她們一樣亮麗的同伴結成緊密的一圈。而無法被納入那個圈子的我，就開始參加很冷門的課後創意寫作班。寫作班的第一課，導師叫我們每人起一個筆名。我看著窗外操場邊的樹，就說，我叫石頭魚，因為我岩巉。那時的導師很喜歡，說他最喜歡岩巉的人了，我沾沾自喜。到後來長大了，我再也沒有用這個幼稚的筆名發表作品，但在文藝圈中，我就叫自己阿石，讓大家不用每次都喚我的中文全名。不用和她們一樣。

那時我說我岩巉，其實不過是因為我當時不知道為什麼曬得很黑，又咬手指。她們排斥我，說我污糟，連我的功課簿，也像傳送臭物一樣，只用兩隻指尖掂著向我的桌子上摔，然後跑去廁所洗手。中學雞之間的事，其實很多時候都沒有為什麼。皮膚黑，咬手指，兩樣都不是我能控制的。但那時，她們讓我真的真的以為，我就是一個殘缺的人，一個有病的人，一個無法停止把骯髒的手指放到嘴裡咬到出血的人，因為她們都不會這樣，只有我會。而且她們說我小題大造，少少嘢就喊，所以才不想和我一起。到底是雞先還是蛋先？我在課室裡看書，她們就用剛好可聞的耳語談論我；當我走出課室，她們就大聲地喧鬧，彷彿沒有我在，她們才能自在、快樂。我不止一次問老師我可不可以一個人完成分組的功課，老師總是說不可以，然後把我指派到一臉不甘的同學組裡。我也忘了這有什麼好哭的，但我就是無法控制，一種古老而貼近群居動物本能的酸痛。老師見了，就會叫我去洗個臉、冷靜一下再回來課室。我就去廁所用凍水狂潑自己的臉，然後去操場邊，找顆石栗種子來踢，踢到下課，再若無其事地回去。

在操場被蚊咬多了，腿上一撻撻，她們又有說我髒的理由。無法

打破的惡性循環。

獮問我，做乜唔出聲啊。我說，沒有啊，有點累。他說，星期五了，可以放鬆一下啦！一陣叫多個冬咁啦！獮總是這麼正能量，明明他寫的詩總是那麼痛，他的散文又對生活中連綿的敲鑿³多麼無可奈何。好啊，我說。今天特地來這間有露天座位的沖繩餐廳，是因為大家說要為我和海老慶祝，慶祝我得了工人文學獎，以及海老終於交了博士論文。啊，還有紅衫今個月生日，說起她，她跑到哪裡了呢？拿著餐廳號碼牌的河馬指指旁邊的景福街休憩處，毛毛雨已經停了，阿鷓和紅衫在樹下摸路人牽著的柴犬。我和河童又對望偷笑。阿鷓和紅衫自從牽著手一起走進編輯部聖誕 party 公開戀情之後，就再也沒有分開過了。河童捲著煙，偷偷的跟我說，他們千萬要幸福，不然分手的話，兩人在編輯部面左左、或是其中一人退出，也會很麻煩啊。我說我睇好呢一對啊，佢哋應該會就咁一世嘅。

咁就一世。那個女孩自殺了，在大學宿舍裡。沒有留下遺書。報紙裡有人猜測她在舍堂裡受到欺凌，或是她其實一直忍著什麼已經忍了好久，忍到終於忍不住了。在喪禮上，她那位還未開始白頭的母親說，希望大家不要再猜測她的死因了，當是對家屬的仁慈。我也沒有進去小室瞻仰她在墮樓後想必經過巧手修復的遺容，因為我怕我在棺木裡看見自己的臉，或是聽見自己為了紓緩緊張而誦起「幾十年不過匆匆一別，無論是為了什麼因由，原是誰也不必為誰而魂飛魄散的」⁴。我在中學時也堅信，我會在二十七歲或之前死去，很有可能是自殺。可是沒有。現在，我廿八歲，生勾勾，和一群跟我年齡相近的奇珍異獸，一起等位吃飯。我是幸運的。

3. 梁秉鈞〈中午在鰻魚涌〉，《中國學生周報》第1127期（1974年7月5日）。

4. 西西〈像我這樣的一個女子〉，《素葉文學》第6期（1982年2月）。

獏說，阿石，妳朋友啊。我問咩事，他指指公園樹身上的牌子，寫著「石栗 candlenut」。為什麼叫 candlenut 呢，常說自己英文不好的獏問。喔，如果你把種子切開，裡面的果仁可以當蠟燭點燃，河馬說，我也撿了幾粒放在辦公室，上次我帶寫作班的文學散步時和學生來這裡看過這群石栗樹，說約十年前有一棵石栗倒下來壓爛一輛寶馬，就有個學生把這個公園寫成那種鱷魚咬人玩具的口腔，不知什麼時候會把公園裡的阿伯像手指一樣嚼成肉醬。大家嘩然：乜宜家啲學生咁恐怖㗎咩？河童說，唔係啊，幾有想像力啊，我都不知幾想遇到這樣的學生，平時教班，三十個學生入面有三個真心聽書我都要去還神囉。

我以前也許過願，想操場的石栗掉些果子下來，打中那些杯葛我的同學。但石栗不是許願樹，不會幫人報仇的。而掉下來或不掉下來，都只是天意。死的是她，不是我。現在，舊同學們如我以前所料地在商業大廈上班，而那時我卻沒想到自己終會在工業大廈當個兼職文學雜誌編輯。其實白天的我也在商業大廈上班，混在把水晶甲造成大理石紋、粉晶紋的女人之間，每日努力把自己打扮得和電梯大堂的雲石地板一樣亮麗，lunchtime 和同事聚餐時聽她們的指甲打在手機表面的聲音，乾淨人工的嗒嗒聲。但我就是無法融入她們之中，也許這和我仍然無法停止咬手指有關。婚宴上一個舊同學曾經很驚訝地用造了 gel 甲的手捉住我岩岩巉巉的手說，妳做乜咁對自己啊，唔好再咬手指啦，再咬嫁唔出嚟。她臉上有了一個和中學時期不同的鼻子，她身邊的死黨臉上多了對可疑的雙眼皮和下巴，而二人的左手上都有了閃亮的訂婚鑽戒。而我，單身的年資比擔任雜誌編輯的年資更深。於是我又再一次在廁所哭了。怎麼隔了這麼多年，我還要受到這種侮辱呢。

不過已經無所謂了。再也不會有中學同學邀請我去她們的婚禮了，就算有，我也不會去了。大家飲杯！恭喜阿石！恭喜海老！

恭喜紅衫！多謝！飲多杯啊招呼唔到啊！祝妳同阿鵲快啲拉埋天窗啊！那麼快樂的聲音，在明明好高好高的石栗樹下，卻響得像有回音。紅衫叫的石鍋飯搶先上桌，坐在我和紅衫中間的獏說，正喎，要不是今天人多坐得密，我都想叫一個。花枝說，無所謂啊，我們都很瘦啊！獏說，咪啦，萬一整親阿石，我點樣賠番個女界伯母？紅衫就無所謂啦，反正都有阿鵲要她了。大家又起哄。河馬說，係喎，趁今日人齊，一陣幫手執一執辦公室啲箱啊。獏說，嘩，咁要食飽啲先好上路囉。我聽了就知道為什麼笑了好久。獏和浣熊，都沒有因為我的臂和肩碰到他們而作狀要消毒、清潔。不像她們。一隻飛蛾飛入公園那邊的黑影裡消失，像喪禮過後我在北角街上看見的那隻。也許，牠不會再來找我了。這樣就好。

回去的時候，工廈的客輦修理好了，但客輦一次只能載五個人，每次都要分兩組乘坐。獏說，我們一起行樓梯上去吧，消化吓。花枝說，係囉，頭先河馬食咗咁多冬甩，容乜易壓到架客輦又壞過嚟。海老說，妳以為佢食咗個石鍋落肚咩。工廈感覺比一般大廈來得堅固，無論再哀愁的人上樓梯時再用力搽地，都不會把用紙皮石、石屎和鋼板鋪成的地面踩爛。這樣的特質，意外地使人安心。來到三樓，辦公室廁所的洗手盆邊仍舊放著半副麻雀和萬聖節留下來的塑膠斷手；雪櫃裡有一瓶 vodka，出版獎座前面堆的朱古力盒都是空的，找不到零食的浣熊大呼上當。好啦好啦，先把這幾箱書搬開，不然無位坐那麼多人了，河馬說。一眾男丁自動自覺埋位，力大如牛的河童也捲起衫袖幫手；港台果套《浮城絮語》話，我們是文化咕喱⁵ 嘛！俾啲掙扎！狹小的辦公室也無法讓太多人同時幫手搬，我就和浣熊一起找在劉以鬯的喪禮上派發的書籤當參考資料，紅衫說應該夾在也斯最後一次在港大演

5. 《避雨》，郭頌儀導演，香港電台劇集《浮城絮語》系列，2020。

講時阿鵝做的筆記裡，在靠窗的書架上。窗邊有一塊來歷不明的石屎和幾粒撿來洗淨的石栗種子，剛搬完書的河童說下次要用鉗把種子爆開來試試是不是真的能點燃果仁，海老抬出之前秋刀離開編輯部時留下的工具箱說，樓下咁多汽車維修員，我哋辦公室有個士巴拿係好合理嘅⁶。浣熊說，好掛住秋刀啊，他現在在做什麼？海老說，之前好像說想考消防員，四萬幾蚊人工一個月，一份糧可以養起二點幾個全職文化版編輯啊。不要再說了，大家陷入哀嚎。花枝說，啊對了，早幾日有人問我水母還在編輯部嗎？浣熊說，不在好多年啦，我們換過那麼多任主編，編輯部也換過幾代人了，為什麼大家還以為水母仍在啊。紅衫說，以前她在的時候，聽講常常開會開到日出，大家困獸鬥地「猝題」，第二天飲完早茶才放大家回家補眠。我對花枝說，妳知道嗎，我加入編輯部之後，就一直主張要開「健康會」，盡量提早開始、早點結束，不然每次開會都坐尾班車回家，會短命的啊。大家聽了就狂笑，也不知道有什麼好笑。但我也笑。

我們每人拉了張椅子，圍在一起，準備開會。又坐在我旁邊的獏問，係嘞，妳正職果度個老細點啊，係咪仲好似妳得獎果首詩咁講，一日到黑做埋晒啲涼薄嘢啊。我說，唉，鬼叫你窮啊頂硬上。不過妳食完飯好似開心咗嘞，獏說。係咩，我說。係啊，一係我幫妳睇吓手相啦，我都有啲研究嘍，他說。我就把手背輕放在他的手心裡讓他秤，暖暖的，我的手意外地抖。有什麼好害羞的呢，都認識兩三年了。他很認真地看了不知多久才說，乖啦，唔好再咬手指啦，好多菌嘍，健康運會唔好嘍。我說頂你啊，唔使你講我都知啦，河馬夠咬手指咯，你又唔話佢。獏說，我講笑之嘛。我作狀打了他手心一下。他笑。他說，妳知道嗎，妳加入編輯部之前，很多時任編輯都在辦公室裡抽煙，但自從妳這個禁

6. 《少林足球》，周星馳導演，2001。

煙份子來了之後，辦公室空氣清新多了。我說，所以是說，我是阻止你們扮周慕雲⁷的人嗎？他說，不，妳是我們的黃水晶，促進大家的健康運。而河馬好像沒有聽見我們的對話：他正忙著拆一封也在新蒲崗設辦公室的藝團忽然送來的信，不知道打開之後，裡面會是一首詩、一朵花，還是一聲招呼⁸。「每個人看書時拇指都是扁的。誰也不必為了自己的拇指而道歉。」開會時我在下一期的大綱草稿上這樣寫。也許，這會是我下一篇作品的成份。

十一點半了，花枝和海老說要先走，要趕尾班船回坪洲啊。阿鵝和紅衫也說要回屯門，先走了。我和獏對望了一下。好像，還未夠鐘。那麼，我們繼續吧。

2020.10.18 新蒲崗八達街

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7. 《花樣年華》，王家衛導演，2000。

8. 梁秉鈞〈新蒲崗的雨天〉，《中國學生周報》第1128期（1974年7月20日）。

石頭魚

/ Rockfish

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

The passenger lift was broken, so we took the cargo lift downstairs to grab a bite to eat. There were nine of us in total, loaded into a cargo lift with a weight limit of 2000 kilograms, or 26 people, everyone spreading out naturally, just like the population density of the actors in the poster for a stage production in the lift waiting area. Observing the weight restriction notice, Squid, who'd never been overweight a day in her life, said, "This cargo lift presumes that each person weighs around 77 kilos. How could there be 20-something people so heavy together in an industrial building lift—is the upstairs rented out to a sumo ring?" Upon hearing this, Sandpiper said, "Hey, what's so unthinkable about a guy weighing more than 70 kilos?" The male editors echoed this sentiment, while most of the female editors were perplexed. Then Hippo chimed in, "Also, didn't Xi Xi say, 'My worry should not weigh more than 44 pounds?'"¹ That is, the maximum amount of worry that a person can carry is 20 kilos, and worrywart Rockfish has already exceeded 77 kilos." "Wow, your mental math is so fast," Squid said. "I studied Pure Mathematics," Hippo said. I wondered to myself, *Wow, how on earth did Hippo guess my weight?* Sure enough,

1. Xi Xi, "The Bearded Door God," *Thumb Weekly* 15 (January 30, 1976). For an English translation by Tammy Lai-Ming Ho, please see *Chinese Literature Today*, 8:1 (2019): 27.

a gymgoer's eyes could serve as scales.

There was a slight drizzle outside. Under the streetlights, the fuzzy mist seemed ticklish. Raccoon said she missed last week's proofreading session because she'd been attending her high school classmate's wedding, and it was nuts—all the guys were now peddling insurance. Had she known, she wouldn't have gone. At that moment, I wanted to tell everyone, *Last night, I went to the funeral of a high school classmate who killed herself.* Today, before dark, I walked from the Diamond Hill MTR station to the editorial office, the entire time going against the dense flow of people leaving work, thinking about another high school classmate asking me "What're you doing here?" at last month's wedding banquet, as though I were a party crasher. I asked myself the same question at the mourning hall for my classmate: *What am I doing here?* We weren't even classmates from the same year; we just worked together on the high school newspaper committee. At the time, I was an overly avant-garde art editor, and she was a student from a lower grade whose teacher helped her score a position to help with writing articles, thanks to her good grades in Chinese. We never even spoke to each other directly. Yet when I learned of her death, I automatically turned down a lecture invitation that coincided with her funeral, donning all black and arriving on time at the mourning hall, as natural as showing up to school on time. When I came back from the funeral home in North Point last night, my mother scowled, purple in the face, asking me, "What were you doing in that kind of place? You weren't close to her." Right, I wasn't close to her. But I felt I had to go—she and I were cut from the same cloth. I always thought that if the tiniest thing had gone only somewhat

differently, I would've died just like she had.

“What're you doing here?” the person who'd been in the same classroom as me for seven years grilled me at the wedding banquet. I wouldn't have wanted to be classmates with those girls if I hadn't been forced to. The streets of San Po Kong were like the seabed in the depths of the ocean, riddled with bumps and holes, craggy and uneven, various darting footsteps walking with me or in different directions, along with cockroaches scuttling out from the side of the street. “Ah, *kaka!*” Raccoon screamed, bolting over to the pedestrian refuge island. “Watch out for cars!” shouted Ebi and Kappa, who were smoking behind. Ah! It turned out I was among a group of people who also called cockroaches “kaka,” just like in Dorothy Tse's story.² What was I doing here? The drizzle seemed to be slightly heavier. Hippo covered his head with the hood of his windbreaker, protecting his oh-so-very-important hairstyle. Kappa and I exchanged glances and snickered. Bringing up the rear, Raccoon asked Sandpiper, “How many subjects are you teaching at university this year?” Sandpiper said, “I'm teaching four classes—shoot me now.” Kappa said, “At least you have a full-time teaching position. I don't even have the opportunity to break my neck shouldering heavy teaching duties. Remember to let me know if you hear of any schools that have openings.” Many of the side-street garages were already closed for the day. Restaurants in industrial buildings on either side of Tai Yau Street only posted menus at the entrances and not signboards. An auntie asked us

how many people were in our group and invited us to sit down inside, not the least bit concerned whether we were upstairs workers legally allowed to eat there. After we walked past, Tapir rushed up and said, “Rockfish, you haven't tried that one—it's okay.” “Yeah? What do they serve?” I asked. “Marbled rockfish soup—it's pleasantly sweet.” I said, “Actually, I don't care for marbled rockfish.” I chuckled. “What? But your name is Rockfish!” Tapir said, laughing. “Can't my 'rock' be from rockfish in general and not marbled rockfish?” I said. “Rockfish is fine, but you're more like a rock beauty angelfish,” he said. “Why?” I asked. “You're more expensive, and you went to an elite school,” he said. “Don't you mean because I'm prettier? Rockfish always look like they've been involved in nuclear accidents,” I said. “Of course you're prettier,” he said.

What was the “rock” in Rockfish? I used to kick around rock-like candlenuts by myself on the school sports ground. The candlenut tree was always there, standing tall, bearing an abundance of fruit soon after the start of the schoolyear. The nuts were as big as bubblegum balls, with brown shells as hard as rocks. There were always some left under the tree after autumn—if you looked for them, you'd find them. I was different from my classmates. They pierced their ears with gold earrings, grew their hair long, studied ballet and violin, and passed piano proficiency exams. Like delicate and smooth crystals, they formed a close circle with companions as bright and beautiful as themselves. Unable to fit in that circle, I started taking unpopular afterschool creative writing classes. In the first lesson of the class, the instructor asked each of us to choose a penname. Gazing out the window at the

2. Dorothy Tse, “Kaka,” *So Black* (Hong Kong: Youth Literary Bookstore, 2003).

trees on the sports ground, I said, “My name is Rockfish, because I’m rough around the edges.” The instructor liked this very much, saying he preferred people who were rough around the edges. I was pleased with myself. When I grew up, I no longer published anything under this juvenile penname, but among the literary circle, I called myself Rockfish so that people didn’t have to use my full Chinese name every time. It didn’t have to be like it had been with those girls.

When I said I was rough around the edges, the truth was, it was merely because back then, I didn’t know why I was so suntanned, or why I bit my fingers. Those girls ostracized me, saying I was dirty. They even treated my school notebook like something stinky, pinching it between two fingertips and dropping it on my desk, then scurrying off to the bathroom to wash their hands. In fact, most of the time, there was no reason for these immature high-school antics. Having dark skin and biting my fingers were both out of my control. But at the time, they really made me think I was a defective person, a sick person, a person who couldn’t stop sticking her dirty fingers in her mouth and biting them until they bled, because they weren’t like that, only I was. And they said I made mountains out of molehills, crying over tiny things, so they didn’t want to play with me. Which came first: the chicken or the egg? When I was reading in the classroom, they’d gossip about me in a barely audible whisper; when I left the classroom, they’d erupt in cheers, as though they could only be free and happy if I weren’t there. More than once, I asked the teacher if I could do group work alone, and the teacher always said no, then assigned me to a group of unwilling classmates. I’d

forget what I was crying about, but I just couldn’t help it, the ache of an ancient, social animal instinct. Upon seeing this, the teacher would tell me to go wash my face and calm down before returning to the classroom. I’d go to the bathroom and splash my face with icy water, then head to the sports ground and find a candlenut to kick, kicking it around until class was over, then I’d come back as if nothing had happened.

The mosquitoes devoured me on the sports ground, marring my legs with blotches, giving those girls yet another reason to say I was dirty. It was a vicious circle that couldn’t be broken.

Tapir asked, “Why are you so quiet?” I said, “It’s nothing—I’m just a little tired.” He said, “It’s Friday, you can relax! In a bit, order an extra donut!” Tapir always radiated such positive energy, while the poems he wrote were clearly so painful, his prose so helpless toward life’s incessant hammerings.³ “Okay,” I said. Today, we’d purposely come to this Okinawan restaurant with outdoor seating because everyone said they wanted to celebrate Ebi and me: my winning the Worker Literature Prize, and Ebi finally submitting his PhD dissertation. Oh, it was also Threadfin’s birthday this month—speaking of her, where’d she run off to? Holding the restaurant number tag, Hippo pointed to the nearby King Fuk Street sitting-out area. The drizzle had stopped. Sandpiper and Threadfin were beneath a tree, petting a Shiba Inu

3. Leung Ping-kwan, “Midday, Quarry Bay,” *Chinese Students’ Weekly* 1127 (July 5, 1974). For an English translation by Kit Kelen, Debby Sou Vai Keng, Chris Song Zijiang, and Iris Fan Xing, please see https://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/Yasi/All_Items/prints/201607/t20160705_79915.html.

being walked by a passerby. Once again, Kappa and I snickered at each other. Sandpiper and Threadfin hadn't been apart ever since they'd strolled hand-in-hand into the editorial office's Christmas party, going public with their relationship. Rolling a cigarette, Kappa stealthily said to me, "They'd better be happy. Otherwise, if they break up, it'll be such a headache—two people avoiding each other in the editorial office, or one of them quitting." I said, "I have faith in those two as a couple. I bet they'll stay this way an entire lifetime."

Just like that, an entire lifetime had been snuffed out. That girl took her own life in the university dormitory. She didn't leave behind a suicide note. The papers speculated that she'd been bullied in the residential hall, or that she'd been putting up with something for a long time, and finally couldn't take it anymore. At her funeral, her not-yet-white-haired mother said, "I hope everyone will stop speculating about the cause of her death and show our family some mercy." I didn't venture into the small room to pay respects to the deceased—whose body must have been repaired by a skillful set of hands after she fell off the building—because I was afraid I would see my own face in the coffin, nor did I find myself chanting, "Decades fly by, and no matter why, no one needs to lose their mind over anyone"⁴ to relieve the tension. In high school, I was also convinced that I would die before the age of 27, probably by suicide. But I didn't. Now, I was 28, alive and kicking, waiting to have dinner with a group of weird and wonderful creatures my age.

4. Xi Xi, "A Woman Like Me," *Plain Leaves Literature* 6 (February 1982). For English translations, please see Howard Goldblatt, "A Woman Like Me," in Joseph S.M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, eds., *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 2nd. edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 315–325, and Rachel May and Zhu Zhiyu, "A Girl Like Me," in Eva Hung, ed. *A Girl Like Me and Other Stories: Enlarged Edition* (Hong Kong: Renditions, 1996), 7–24.

I was fortunate.

Tapir said, "Hey Rockfish, it's your friend!" I asked what he was talking about. He pointed to a sign on a tree in the park that read CANDLENUT in both Chinese and English—the Chinese name literally meant "rock chestnut." "Why's it called 'candlenut' in English?" Tapir asked. He often claimed his English wasn't good. "Oh, if you cut open the shell, the seed inside can be lit like a candle," Hippo said. "I also picked up a few and put them in the office. Last time I took my writing class on a literary walk, I came here with my students and saw this group of candlenut trees. About ten years ago, a candlenut tree fell over and crushed a BMW. One student wrote about this park as the mouth of one of those snapping Crocodile Dentist toys, at any given time chomping down on the old men in the park, chewing them into mincemeat just like fingers." Everyone was in an uproar: *How come students these days are so horrible?* Kappa said, "No, that's so imaginative! How I'd love to meet such a student. Usually when I teach a class, I have to thank the gods for having three students out of thirty who actually listen to me."

In the past, I may have hoped that the candlenuts on the sports ground would fall and strike those classmates who'd ostracized me. But the candlenut tree wasn't a wishing tree—it wouldn't help someone exact revenge. Whether they fell or not was only providence. She was the one who died, not me. Now, my former classmates worked in commercial buildings just as I'd expected, but back then, I'd never have guessed that I'd end up a part-time literary magazine editor in an industrial building.

Actually, daytime me also worked in a commercial building, mixing with women who transformed gel nails into marble and rose quartz designs. Every day, I tried to make myself up as bright and beautiful as the marble floor in the lift lobby. When I ate alongside female coworkers at lunchtime, I listened to the clean, artificial tap-tap of their fingernails drumming against their cell phones. But I just couldn't fit in with them, perhaps because I still couldn't stop biting my fingers. At the wedding banquet, an old classmate was taken aback to catch my jagged hands with her gel nails, saying, "Why do you do that to yourself? Don't bite your fingers anymore. If you keep on biting them, you'll never get married." The nose on her face was different than the one she had in high school, and her sidekick had a suspicious-looking pair of double eyelids and chin. Both sported sparkly diamond engagement rings on their left hands. I, on the other hand, had been single for more years than I'd been the editor of a literary magazine. And so, I cried in the bathroom yet again. After all these years, I was still subject to such humiliation.

But it didn't matter anymore. No one from high school would ever invite me to their wedding again, and if they did, I wouldn't go. *Bottoms up, everyone! Congratulations, Rockfish! Congratulations, Ebi! Congratulations, Threadfin! Thanks so much! Have another glass—please excuse my poor hospitality! May you and Sandpaper soon tie the knot!* Such cheerful voices reverberated beneath the towering candlenut trees. The stone pot rice that Threadfin ordered was served first. Tapir, who was sitting between Threadfin and me, said, "Wow, that looks so good—if we weren't so squished together today, I'd order one." Squid said, "It doesn't

matter—we're all skinny!" Tapir said, "Nah, if I injured Rockfish, how would I make it up to her mother for what I'd done to her daughter? I'm not worried about Threadfin—anyway, she already has Sandpiper." Everyone hooted and hollered again. Hippo said, "Hey, since we're all here today, let's clean up the boxes in the office." Tapir said, "Wow, it's like a last meal." Upon hearing this, I laughed and laughed for some unknown reason. Tapir and Raccoon didn't have to be disinfected and cleaned just because my arms and shoulders brushed up against them. They weren't like those girls. A moth flew into the shadows on the other side of the park and disappeared, just like the one I saw on the street in North Point after the funeral. Perhaps it wouldn't come to me anymore. That was fine by me.

When we got back, the passenger lift in the industrial building had been repaired, but it could only hold five passengers at once. Each time, we had to divide into two groups. Tapir said, "Let's take the stairs and let our food digest." Squid said, "Right, Hippo ate so many donuts just now—he could easily break the passenger lift again." Ebi said, "C'mon—you act like he swallowed the whole stone pot." Industrial buildings felt sturdier than ordinary buildings. Even if a grief-stricken person tramped up the stairs, stomping on the ground, they wouldn't have been able to crush the floor comprised of mosaic tiles, concrete, and steel plates. Such qualities were surprisingly reassuring. On the third floor, there was still half a mahjong set and a plastic severed hand left over from Halloween beside the sink in the office bathroom, and a bottle of vodka in the freezer. The chocolate boxes stacked in front of the publishing awards were all empty—Raccoon, who

couldn't find any snacks, yelled out that she'd been tricked. "Okay, okay, first move these boxes of books out of the way, or there won't be enough places for everyone to sit," Hippo said. The group of able-bodied men automatically assumed position. Kappa, who was as strong as an ox, also rolled up her sleeves to help. "According to the RTHK series *Floating City*, we are cultural coolies!⁵ Keep at it!" Too many people couldn't move around the narrow office at the same time. Raccoon and I searched for the bookmarks that had been distributed at Liu Yichang's funeral as reference materials. Threadfin said they should've been tucked away on the bookshelf by the window with the notes Sandpiper took during Leung Ping-kwan's last lecture at HKU. Beside the window was a piece of concrete of unknown origin and a few candlenuts that had been washed clean. Kappa, who'd just finished moving books, said, "Next time, crack the shells open with a pair of pliers and see if you can actually ignite the seeds." Ebi hauled out the toolbox that Mackerel had left behind when he quit the editorial office, saying, "Since there are so many car repair shops down below, it's perfectly reasonable for us to have a wrench in the office."⁶ Raccoon said, "How I miss Mackerel! What's he up to now?" Ebi said, "Before, it seems like he was thinking of trying to be a firefighter. It pays 40-something thousand bucks a month, enough to feed two or so full-time cultural editors." *Say no more*, everyone groaned. Squid said, "Oh right, the other day, someone asked me if Jellyfish was still in the editorial office." Raccoon said, "Not in several years. We've gone through so many chief editors and several generations

of editorial staff. Why would people think Jellyfish is still around?" Threadfin said, "When she was here, I heard they often held meetings until sunrise, everyone like pent-up beasts forced to fight each other, battling head to head figuring out topics. They could only go home and catch up on sleep after dim sum the following morning." I said to Squid, "You know, ever since I joined the editorial board, I've been advocating for 'healthy meetings,' trying to start and end as early as possible. Otherwise, each time we have a meeting, everyone will have to take the last bus home, thereby shortening our lifespans." Everyone howled wildly with laughter—I didn't know what was so funny. But I also laughed.

Each of us pulled up a chair and gathered around to prepare for the meeting. Tapir, who again sat next to me, asked, "By the way, how's your day-job boss? Is he still like your prize-winning poem, doing all sorts of cold-hearted things day in and day out?" I said, "Alas, when you're broke, you have no choice but to keep putting your nose to the grindstone." "But you seem to be happier after eating," Tapir said. "Yes," I said. "How about I read your palm for you? I've studied how to do it," he said. I lightly placed the back of my hand in his palm for him to weigh. It felt warm. My hand shook unexpectedly. What was there to be so shy about? We'd known each other for a couple of years. He inspected it carefully for some time before saying, "Good girl. Don't bite your fingers anymore. They're filled with germs—it'll be bad luck for your health." I said, "Oh, up yours, I know that without you telling me. Hippo bites his fingers too, and you don't say anything to him." Tapir said, "I'm just joking." I smacked the palm of his hand. He laughed. He said, "You know, before you joined the editorial board,

5. "Taking Shelter from the Rain," directed by Kwok Chung-Yee, from *Floating City*, Radio Television Hong Kong TV series, 2020.

6. *Shaolin Soccer*, directed by Stephen Chow, 2001.

a lot of editors smoked in the office, but ever since anti-smoker Rockfish arrived, the air in the office has been much fresher.” I said, “So you’re saying I’m trying to stop you guys from acting like Chow Mo-wan in *In the Mood for Love*?”⁷ He said, “No, you’re our very own citrine, promoting everyone’s good health.” Hippo seemed not to have overheard our conversation—he was busy opening up a letter from an arts group that also had an office in San Po Kong, not knowing whether he’d find a poem, a flower, or a greeting inside after he opened it.⁸ *Everyone’s thumb is flat when reading. No one has to apologize for their thumb.* During our meeting, I scribbled down these sentences on the draft outline for the next issue. Perhaps they would become part of my next piece.

It was 11:30. Squid and Ebi announced they were leaving to catch the last ferry back to Peng Chau. Sandpiper and Threadfin also said they were going back to Tuen Mun and headed out. Tapir and I looked at each other. It seemed like we still had some time. So then, we’d continue on.

October 18, 2020 Pat Tat Street, San Po Kong

English translation and Chinese original both published in Ed. The House of Hong Kong Literature, *By the Trees - San Po Kong*, Hong Kong: The House of Hong Kong Literature, 2021.

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7. *In the Mood for Love*, directed by Wong Kar-wai, 2000.
 8. Leung Ping-kwan, “Rainy Days in San Po Kong,” *Chinese Students’ Weekly* 1128 (July 20, 1974).

可不可以說我鄉是…

/ Can We Say My Hometown Is...

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

在我們討論「冬瓜豆腐」和「三長兩短」的寓意和起源時，我又再次意識到我們都來自香港。那時我們捧著飯碗、拿著塑膠筷子吃著妳媽媽準備的炒菜和蒸魚，討論起我來倫敦進修前研究過的廣東話委婉詞；不用戴眼鏡的妳那晚聽著剛從 Oxford Street 拿到新眼鏡的我、和同樣「四眼」的妳媽媽訴說為什麼在香港配近視眼鏡的師傅很可能比英國的視光師熟練，臉上露出了一種看著異國人談外國生活習俗的陌生感。我在倫敦生活的日子前前後後加起來已有一年多，一般生活起居的新鮮感已經消褪，和戴眼鏡的生活有點像，現在只會留意到鏡片起霧、被雨沾濕和度數不對的時刻。而在聖誕來臨前，已經移居英國十多年的妳往妳的輪椅上掛滿彩燈，我想這樣有型的背影如果出現在香港街頭一定會引來許多目光，只是妳和整個有型的倫敦一樣，早就已經習以為常了吧。

如果家鄉是「竊餐」

在這裡新認識的英國人朋友說我的東方面孔容易招來街上的種族歧視，可是在滿有來自五湖四海的人的倫敦街上行走時，我常常忘記我的長相清楚地標示出我並非「西人」。我彷彿是一個裝在西班牙品牌的大衣、蘇格蘭製茄士咩頸巾、日本品牌牛仔褲和英國品牌皮靴裡的幽靈（那些因資本主義而在香港和倫敦都可以買到的衣物），以比一般倫敦人快的腳步逆風前進，看不見披在腦後的天然長黑髮（那在東方被視為女鬼特徵、在「鬼佬」眼中是日本動漫女高中生的模樣），也不在意輪廓相對扁平、使我被以前在倫敦認識的戀人稱為「眯眼亞洲人」（squinty-eyed Asian）的面容，自覺透明得無法被任何人定義身份或國籍或城籍或鄉下

為何。因為我不在乎、路人也不在乎我來自哪裡，我便可以抓緊時間看見倫敦的美麗，那些我們在課堂裡讀過的十九世紀中至今的英語文學裡書寫過的街區和人文——並握著在 Victoria train station 買來的熱茶擠在早上的通勤人潮裡趕路回校。

只是回到同是來自香港的舌頭面前，那些在街頭被我遺忘了的香港特質便忽然變得鮮明。比如英國的大學在中秋節前一星期的九月底開學，硬生生把隻身來留學的我從聚滿家人和朋友的香港拔起移到外國的月亮下；這時妳第一次邀我到妳的宿舍去和妳媽媽一起製作港式蛋撻（英國原裝的 egg custard tart 完全比不上港式蛋撻的細緻）、用煉奶泡熱奶茶（港式煉奶奶茶比英式鮮奶奶茶濃滑得多了），又讓我留下吃叉燒炒蛋和糖水、並在晚飯後把兩個雙黃白蓮蓉月餅交到我手裡。那天我便彷彿穿過了隨意門，回到我所熟悉的香港裡。

可不可以說，我們的家鄉就是月餅、廣東話和同學媽媽準備的飯後果？我想起我在香港讀中學時常常跑到好友智希的家裡看漫畫，到了晚上也常常被她媽媽留下來「竊餐」，然後在我回家前往我手裡塞些甜酸蕃頭和枋樞醬讓我帶給我母嚙嚙。我中學時代的同學媽媽們對我都義無反顧地親切，像每次見面都送我手作麵包糕餅的妳媽媽一樣大方。妳大概也記得香港的房子比英國的小很多吧，可是我朋友們的媽媽總是樂於讓我不時打擾、和朋友們一起做功課或看《哈利波特》電影 VCD（是的，第一集電影推出時 VCD 仍然是主流）再留下來吃晚飯；在因為「土地問題」而使許多人無法輕鬆地戀愛、結婚和交配繁殖的香港，和女兒的同學分享住家空間便顯得更加慷慨。在英國讀中學的妳不知道有沒有這

樣被同學母親招待的經驗呢？聖誕節在妳家當 house guest 時，我又像坐上了時光機，回到中學時的同學家裡。

如果家鄉是海洋公園家庭照

妳位於 Kent 的老家和我的中學同學們的家都很像，都有一座直身鋼琴、一屋暖色的黃光燈，照見放在鋼琴上的妳們的童年照片，攝於海洋公園的登山纜車前或澳洲的抱樹熊活動裡。在其中一個相框裡妳挽著穿牛津大學畢業袍的哥哥的手，風把妳的長髮美麗地揚起、陽光把妳媽媽的變色鏡片曬黑，妳哥哥咧齒而笑得看不見眼睛的模樣，跟那天在 gelato 店他看見「抵食夾大件」的豪華芒果新地一樣徹底地快樂。妳媽媽大概是把對妳的愛護分了一些給我：她把小暖爐和電暖氈搬進妳使用輪椅以前的房間裡給我，房間裡的書架上放了幾本應該屬於她的中醫、穴位和推拿書，後來我雙手神經失序時她二話不說地把我手抱在懷裡仔細的揉捏，我想她每次給妳按摩雙腿時大概也是同樣的堅強而溫柔吧（我的母親也學過中醫穴位和按摩，也在我那精瘦的弟弟身上練習過）。大概我們這一代於回歸前後在香港出生的孩子，都有寵愛我們的母親帶著我們的那一兩個兄弟姊妹去過海洋公園、坐過仍使用金屬餐具的飛機去過外國，而相對寡言的父親則站在鏡頭的後面，把日後會成為童年照的影像用菲林相機拍下來、拿去曬相舖、裝飾在客廳裡。可不可以說這樣的家庭照就是我們共同的香港記憶？畢竟這樣的家庭關係，不是每個「眯眼亞洲人」都共有；有些地方幾個世代裡的人都沒有兄弟姊妹呢。

那位於樓上的房間床上鋪著和我小時候用的一模一樣的 Sanrio 卡通床單，樓下以客廳改建而成的妳的房間裡則放滿了許多由香港陪伴妳至今的毛公仔。妳哥哥也和我的眾多朋友們一樣，喜歡日本動漫和卡通人物；妳的親人給妳寄來的那個鬆弛熊形鬆餅模

具，也讓我們三個香港兒童一起吃到了特別快樂的早餐。可不可以說我們童年的另一個共通點就是明明活在香港，卻被日本卡通和點心圍繞？那樣的童年使我現在仍常在英國被誤認作日本人，或是需和外國人解釋為什麼我明明不是日本人卻常常在煮日式料理。可不可以說，在我們這一代以前，香港已是日本流行文化和飲食文化的殖民地？就算到了外國留學，我的朋友們從香港寄給我的禮物往往是日本文具和零食；倫敦和香港一樣有許多日本料理快餐店，我的室友把她工作的店裡賣不完的三文魚壽司帶回來請我吃時，我總覺得我又回到了滿街「日本嘢」的香港，以曲折的方式解了一種奇怪的鄉愁。

香港人許多年前便喜歡穿越各國的國境，有些人留下，有些人回歸。已離開香港十多年的妳說過妳已經漸漸忘了許多中文字的讀音和模樣，只是來自我們共同的家鄉的記憶，除了紀錄在語言裡也記錄在味蕾上，在童年記憶和家庭裡，那些比靈魂更無形但更堅定持久的地方。香港作為我鄉也許真像馬格列特（Magritte）所畫的那頂著一座浮城的石，難以追溯單一或清晰的起源或未來，但那海景和地心引力的角度給那些居民塑出好多看不見的共通點，讓他們到其他或許有根的城裡時才赫然發現。

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可不可以說我鄉是...

/ Can We Say My Hometown Is...

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

As we deliberated the implied meanings and origins of the expressions “winter melon and tofu” and “three long and two short,” both referring to death, I once again found myself aware that we were all from Hong Kong. Holding our rice bowls, using plastic chopsticks to eat your mom’s stir-fried vegetables and steamed fish, we discussed the Cantonese euphemisms I’d researched before coming to London for advanced studies. That night, you, who didn’t need to wear glasses, listened to me, who’d just purchased new glasses from Oxford Street, telling your mom, who, like me, was also “four-eyed,” why the specialists in Hong Kong who make glasses for the nearsighted are probably more skilled than British optometrists, a sense of strangeness crossing your face as you watched someone from another country chatting about foreign habits and customs. By then, I’d been living in London for more than a year, and the novelty of daily life had worn off. It was a bit like life wearing glasses—I only noticed it in moments when the lenses were foggy, wet from the rain, and the prescription was wrong. Before Christmas, you, who’d already been in England for more than ten years, festooned your wheelchair with colored lights. I think that such a stylish back view would attract a lot of attention if it were to appear on the streets of Hong Kong, but both you and all of stylish London were long used to it.

IF MY HOMETOWN IS “MOOCHING A FAMILY MEAL”

My new British friends here claim that my East Asian face makes me vulnerable to racism while out in public, but as I wander the streets of London, teeming with people from all corners of the world, I often forget that my features clearly indicate that I’m not a “Westerner.” It’s as though I’m a Spanish overcoat, a Scottish cashmere scarf, an apparition in Japanese jeans and English leather boots (clothing that can be bought in both Hong Kong and London thanks to capitalism). Walking against the wind at a pace faster than the average Londoner, I can’t see the naturally long, black hair flowing behind my head (which, in the East, is regarded as a characteristic of female ghosts, while in foreigners’ eyes, it’s associated with the appearance of high school girls in Japanese anime), unbothered that the profile of my face is relatively flat—which has prompted ex-lovers in London to label me a “squinty-eyed Asian”—so self-consciously transparent that no one can define my identity or nationality or my city of residence or my hometown. Because I don’t care, and passersby also don’t care where I’m from, I can take the time to admire London’s beauty—the neighborhoods and culture from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present that we read about in English literature class—then squeeze into the surge of morning commuters, rushing back to school, gripping the hot tea bought at Victoria train station.

It is only when I encounter other tongues from Hong Kong that all of those Hong Kong characteristics I’ve forgotten about suddenly become vivid. For example, English universities start classes at the end of September, one week prior to the Mid-Autumn

Festival, forcibly transplanting me, who was studying abroad alone, from Hong Kong, where my family and friends were gathered, to underneath a foreign moon; that's when you first invited me to your dormitory to make Hong Kong-style egg tarts with your mom (the original English egg custard tart is not nearly as delicate as the Hong Kong-style egg tart) and brew hot milk tea with condensed milk (Hong Kong-style milk tea with condensed milk is much smoother than English tea with milk), inviting me to stay and eat eggs fried with char siu pork, as well as tong sui dessert soup, placing two double-yolk white lotus paste mooncakes in my hands after dinner. It was as if I'd passed through a random door, swept back to my familiar Hong Kong.

Can we say that our hometown is a mooncake, the result of the Cantonese language and a meal prepared by a classmate's mother? I remember that when I was in secondary school in Hong Kong, I often went to my friend Ena's home to look at manga. In the evening, her mom regularly invited me to stay and "mooch a family meal," and then I'd return home, my hands stuffed with sweet-and-sour pickled Chinese onions and yellow mangosteen sauce for my mother to try. All of my secondary school classmates' mothers were unfailingly kind to me, as hospitable as your mom, who gives me handmade cakes every time we meet. You probably remember that the homes in Hong Kong are much smaller than those in England, but my friends' moms were always happy to let me drop by every now and then to do homework with friends or watch the *Harry Potter* movie on VCD (yes, when the first movie came out, VCDs were still mainstream) and then stay for dinner. In Hong Kong, where many people can't easily date, marry, or procreate due to

the "land problem," sharing space with their daughter's classmate was all the more generous. Did you, who were in England while in secondary school, ever have the experience of being hosted by a classmate's mother? When I was your houseguest at Christmas, it was as though I was in a time machine, transported back to my classmate's home during my secondary school days.

IF MY HOMETOWN IS A FAMILY PHOTO AT OCEAN PARK

Your home in Kent is quite similar to my classmates' homes: all have an upright piano and a room bathed in warm yellow light, your childhood photos—taken in front of a cable car in Ocean Park or during an activity with Australian koalas—perched atop the piano. In one of the picture frames, you're holding the hand of your elder brother who wears an Oxford graduation gown, the wind beautifully tousling your long hair, sunlight darkening your mom's color-changing lenses, your brother grinning so widely that you can't see his eyes, as completely over the moon as he was that day at the gelato shop when he laid eyes on a "more bang for your buck" sumptuous mango sundae. Your mom has probably shared some of her love for you with me: she placed a small heater and electric blanket for me to use in the room that was yours before you were in a wheelchair, the shelves lined with books on Traditional Chinese Medicine, acupoints, and tuina massage that must've belonged to her—later, when I had a nerve disorder in my hands, without saying a word, she took my hands in her arms and carefully kneaded them. I suppose she was just as strong and gentle whenever she massaged your legs (my mother also learned Traditional Chinese Medicine, acupoints, and massage, practicing

on my little brother who was all skin and bones). I guess that children of my generation born in Hong Kong around the time of the handover all have doting mothers who've taken us and our siblings to Ocean Park and flown us to foreign countries on planes that still used metal cutlery, while our relatively reserved fathers stood behind the camera, shooting rolls of film that would later become childhood photos, dropped off at the photo shop to be developed before adorning the living room. Can we say that such family photos are our common Hong Kong memories? After all, not every "squinty-eyed Asian" has this kind of family relationship; in some places, people haven't had siblings for generations.

The bed in the upstairs room was covered in the same Sanrio sheets I used as a child. The downstairs living room had been converted into your room, filled with the various stuffed animals that accompanied you from Hong Kong. Like many of my friends, your elder brother loved Japanese anime and cartoon characters; the Rilakkuma-shaped waffle maker that your relatives sent you allowed us three Hong Kong kids to enjoy an especially cheerful breakfast. Can we say that another common feature of our childhood was being surrounded by Japanese cartoons and snacks while clearly living in Hong Kong? To this day, such a childhood still frequently causes me to be mistaken for a Japanese person in England, or to have to explain to foreigners why I often cook Japanese food although I'm not Japanese. Can we say that a generation ago, Hong Kong was a colony of Japanese pop culture and food culture? Even while I'm studying abroad, the gifts that my friends send me from Hong Kong tend to be Japanese stationery and snacks. There are many Japanese fast-food restaurants in

both London and Hong Kong. When my roommate brings me unsold salmon sushi from the restaurant where she works, I always feel like I'm back in the streets of Hong Kong overflowing with "Japanese stuff," solving a peculiar kind of homesickness in a roundabout way.

Even many years ago, Hongkongers already were fond of crossing national borders. Some stayed behind, and some returned. You, who've been away from Hong Kong for more than ten years, said that over time, you've forgotten the pronunciation and appearance of a number of Chinese characters, but the memories of our shared homeland aren't only recorded in language but also on taste buds, in childhood recollections and families, places more intangible but more enduring than the soul. As our hometown, perhaps Hong Kong is truly like the stone with the floating city painted by Magritte: it's challenging to trace a single or clear origin or future, but views of the sea and angles of gravity have molded its residents' numerous invisible commonalities, which they are shocked to unearth when they are in other cities that might have roots.

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根深

/ **Deep-Rooted**

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

她跟妳說他真的要與妳分手時，妳只聽見漫天婆娑的樹葉聲，竊竊私語。那兩棵長在香港大學般咸道外牆的石牆樹，氣根垂落成千成萬的視線，樹葉一眨一眨，然後沙啦沙啦，把粉末般的耳語灑落在般咸道上，妳抬頭，但無法辨清誰人說了什麼。白得近藍的光管在妳眼裡灼出短暫的光影，妳並不在樹下，也不在般咸道，真實的是正在律師樓裡說著那些像判辭的話的妳。

其實那不止是分手，而是悔婚。妳本來以為那只是原定作妳伴娘的妳為了給妳辦告別單身驚喜派對的借口——略嫌不吉利的借口，但妳知道她這種長年只會埋首讀書的怪人，通通都不懂得人情世故。那時候妳和他都已經拍好了婚紗照，訂好了減肥計劃、脫毛療程和新娘化妝師，妳的伴娘團已經全部量過身訂造她們的伴娘裙，那張標題是「I said yes」的訂婚戒指照片代妳把婚訊公告天下，在眾人眼中妳和他已經合而為一。妳問她是不是妳和他之間的第三者，她絕不承認。然後妳看見妳母親看著妳，不敢直望她或他的父母，示意妳簽署桌上他早已簽好的解除婚約協議書。

妳不知道原來她和他已經親近得可以代他發言。

用刀傷人是犯法的，老實說，妳既沒有那種膽量，更沒有能憑自己的力氣把刀刺進她或他體內的信心。於是妳開始每天找借口經過般咸道，拿一把舊鎖匙偷偷地狠刮石牆樹的外皮，名副其實的刀仔鋸大樹。當然，樹也不見得因為妳的攻擊而有什麼重大的損傷，妳再用力也頂多只能在又老又厚的樹皮上留下淺淺的刮痕，連那些熱戀中的自私鬼在樹上留下自己和情人的名字的程度也不及。妳本來非常喜歡這兩棵細葉榕，和他拍婚紗照時更特意要求他站在樹下，而妳坐在那樹寄生的古老圍牆上，讓巨大裙襬上所有的白紗所有的蕾絲、刺繡和珠片垂落，順著盤纏的樹幹，望向

抬頭望妳的他。婚紗照這種將為千秋萬代記錄愛情頂峰的證據，總得包括一些歷史悠久的物事作永恆的意象，而妳和他既然是在殖民地時代建立的香港大學相識，讓校門外這兩棵老樹見證妳和他的婚姻相當恰當。

那是多麼難拍照的位置：八十多歲樹齡的細葉榕長在港大鄧志昂樓的圍牆外，粗壯曲折的樹根緊緊抓住矮牆和古老的欄杆，把圍牆外原本已經窄得只能勉強讓兩人並肩前行的行人路佔去大半。平日路人經過樹下時總得排成單行，逐一側身穿過樹幹和行人路欄杆之間的空隙，因此許多人索性只走對面英皇書院和「薄餅博士」店前較寬闊的行人路。兩邊行人路中間的般咸道有兩條行車線，東行和西行的雙層巴士、來往數碼港或西半山豪宅的私家車、為附近食店送外賣的電單車等從沒間斷地在鏡頭前駛過，妳的婚紗攝影師站在英皇書院那邊的行人路上，差點忘記了他的職業沒有發脾氣的資格。還好後來攝影師在轉角斜坡上的禮賢會教堂平台，找到可以從高處拍攝般咸道的位置，換上像狗仔隊遠處偷拍般的長鏡頭，拍下妳和他在老樹下對望的畫面；英皇書院外的行人路上站滿了用手機拍妳的路人，妳毫不介意。那些在紅地毯上被幾十個鏡頭看著的天王巨星大概就是這樣的感覺了。

明明那麼困難的拍攝和更多的苦難都曾經一起克服過來，為什麼妳和他的愛情最終還是會爛尾收場？妳和他一起挑選婚紗照、放進設計成迷你相冊的喜帖時，他看著妳在西環各處的石牆樹前拍下的一系列婚紗照，相當快樂。那時他好像心事重重，但他既然笑了，妳就沒有在意。這是妳的婚紗照，人生中最重要的一張，在世人面前定義妳的婚姻是否美麗高雅的宣傳照。妳在照片裡明明笑得那麼燦爛。

要銷毀一切和妳那胎死腹中的婚姻有關的公眾記錄，幾乎是不可

能的事。妳可以刪除發佈到網上的婚禮資訊，取消一切預訂了的時間、空間和服務，但妳無法讓當日在般咸道上拍過妳婚紗照的人手機裡的照片通通消失，也無法讓每一個知情的人忘記妳曾為婚禮多麼雀躍。妳在社交媒體上發放一張黑白獨照，隱晦地說妳和他在諸多考慮過後，決定分開，各自尋找自己的幸福，並祝福彼此，像藝人宣佈離婚一樣強裝冷靜得體。妳的伴娘團和朋友們小心翼翼地問候或探問內情，妳起初還會急於自辯，但妳慢慢地明白沒有誰會相信妳。妳很清楚每個人都在交換各人對妳被悔婚內情的猜測，妳不知道當中多少人知道真相。後來妳只想讓包括自己在內的所有人都忘記妳和他曾經是一對這件事。妳把求婚戒指丟到堅尼地城的海裡，他送給妳的毛公仔、香水、書本和旅行紀念品，也全數運到垃圾站去，不想留下任何足以讓妳觸景生情的物事。最難丟掉的，是那幅婚紗攝影套餐裡附送的大型婚紗照油畫。原來妳打算把它放在婚宴的入口，然後掛在新居睡房內，保佑妳的婚姻不致被外人動搖。妳把油畫丟到垃圾站後，不知哪個八卦的街坊路過看見了，居然拍照上傳到臉書的西環街坊公開群組裡，留言的網民要麼對妳的婚姻作出諸多猜測與嘲諷，要麼假裝感傷地剪貼謝安琪《囍帖街》或何韻詩《木紋》的歌詞贈興。妳的一位老友私下告訴妳婚紗油畫被網民取笑的事，妳又羞又怒地封鎖了那位老友和那個臉書群組。可是那又有什麼用？妳不認識的眾多網民都已經看見妳狼狽的證據，也認出妳拍婚紗照的場景就是街坊都熟悉的般咸道鄧志昂樓石牆樹下。難道妳在嘗試用鎖匙把樹砍掉以外，還要把整個西環裡知道這棵樹的人都滅口嗎？悠悠眾口，樹影婆娑。妳閉上眼，就能聽見那些細碎的，細碎的聲音，像蚊一樣懸在耳邊。

妳從沒想過，妳和他的戀情，最終會這樣結束。妳更沒想過，他

會和剛好回港的她走在一起。妳在中學時就知道，妳和跳級往外國極速讀到博士學位的她是兩種完全不同的生物，但當時妳也不覺得有什麼所謂，反正妳早知道自己對當學者完全沒有興趣。在妳預想的人生裡，妳只要求自己得到一個由港大頒發的本科學位，找到一個四肢健全五官端正無不良嗜好身家清白上進顧家的丈夫、當一個稱職的家庭主婦，已經滿足了生而為人的兩項主要任務，可是這一切居然比預想中困難。妳和他認識時，他是妳的私人補習老師。妳並不喜歡讀書，但妳喜歡他。妳把他追到手以後一直瞞著妳媽拍拖，還真的成功瞞到妳考進了大學才被她發現。妳媽本來還一直向妳潑冷水，說妳和他的戀情不會長久，可是當他碩士畢業、找到大學助教教職時，妳媽卻在陪妳和他影畢業相時向他暗示他是時候和妳定下來了。

妳大學三年級時，他果然向妳求婚了。妳馬上把婚訊在網上公諸於世，幾百個朋友在網上祝賀妳，連妳已經忘記了的舊同學都統統出現了。記憶總是那樣根深柢固，妳沒忘記妳和他在一起的消息被妳當時的中學同學們發現時，她們曾經怎樣談論妳和他戀情的未來。他和一個十六歲的女生在一起，難道真的是因為真愛嗎？像妳這樣總是只求合格就好的學生，和一個大學助教在一起，真的合得來嗎？像妳這樣年輕的女子，那麼急於和比妳年長的男子交往，到底想得到什麼？有多少在中學時開始的戀情，在當事人大學畢業後還能維持？那些竊竊私語像穿過細葉榕樹葉空隙的街燈一般落在妳腳尖前，妳看不清是哪一塊樹葉擋去燈光，但每走一步，陰影都落在妳身上，讓妳不忿。

妳只能一直假設每一個人都不相信妳的戀情，努力向每一個方位展現妳和他的幸福。他和妳去吃的每一頓飯、他傳給妳的每一個早安或晚安短訊、他和妳一起逛街看電影喝珍珠奶茶坐地鐵等巴士，妳都拍照上傳，讓每一個願意看的人都能看見妳和他過得有

多甜蜜。只要持續的向八卦的人們供應妳和他仍快樂地在一起的證據，別人再非議妳們的戀情都不會有說服力了。而現在妳左手無名指上有了他送的訂婚戒指，別人就更加無話可說。妳在社交媒體上若有所指地說，妳和他的戀情並非一帆風順，而他套在妳無名指上的戒指，正好向每一個不看好妳的人證明，妳的愛情可以戰勝所有閒言閒語。或許有份對妳閒言閒語或其實無辜的人都對妳的發言讚好，妳總算是為自己出了一口氣：樹大招風，世上總有樂見妳狼狽的人，妳反擊的方法，只有在所有人面前一直展現妳的快樂和美麗。

大學四年級時，妳的生活忽然變得非常不順利。畢業論文被教授指控涉嫌抄襲，導修課的出席率又不夠，學系要求妳延遲一年畢業，以重寫論文和補足課時。和妳同年的宿友們都找到銀行見習經理的職位或部署好投考公務員的各項考試了，連妳以為最不可能找到工作的歷史系同學都找到研究助理或銀行檔案部門的職位了，只有妳還在跟大學的畢業要求糾纏。每一個朋友獲得聘書的消息，都像在質問妳為什麼落後大隊；妳羞愧得只想躲起來，但每個人的問候和報喜總會刺進妳的耳內。論文補寫到一半，便是中學同學們相約穿畢業袍拍照的季節，妳努力假裝為了認真完成論文才自願延遲畢業，在社交媒體上每天分享桌面擺滿參考資料和咖啡的照片，每天從網上抄來一些名人和學者對學術追求的金句和語錄——妳可不會給她們任何蔑視妳的理由，但消息總像氣體一樣容易洩漏，妳隱約聽說有人好像已經看穿妳的謊言，但妳無法確認消息來源，只能若無其事地繼續假裝自己對論文題目非常感興趣，更一度謊稱有意把論文發展成碩士研究題目，荒謬得很。

而這樣微小的所謂抄襲事件居然會是妳和他戀情的最大危機。他竟然認同妳的教授，認為妳把幾年前別人交過的論文裡的

literature review 只改一改文法就放進自己的論文裡，是懶惰而不認真的行為。只要一所大學裡有任何一個成員不重視學術誠信，那麼整所大學裡的每一個人、整座城市、甚至整個學術範疇裡的學者，都不會被世人信任，他說。妳不敢相信當時已經和妳訂婚的他竟然不和妳站在同一陣線，還附和外人對妳的指控，更把那樣的「小事」說成影響深遠的大事，真是過份地誇張。明明所有學者寫的文章都只是用不同方法把那些別人說過的話循環再造，但妳只要稍微不跟從無聊的規矩把別人論文的內容改頭換面、直接搬字過紙就會被指控抄襲、違反學術誠信，這樣不公平的規矩妳怎可能甘心接受？而妳也不過是一個小小的本科生、寫著一份除了妳的教授以外沒有人會在乎的功課，一點小小的犯規居然被他扯到危害整個學術範疇那麼嚴重，不是太過份了嗎？妳和他吵架吵得前所未有地激烈，激烈得妳幾乎可以看見戀愛終結的結局懸在面前。妳知道他對於某些奇怪的原則有著無可撼動的堅持，但哪有人真的會因為抄功課這種「小學雞」理由而分手？妳極度懷疑他只想找借口悔婚，妳又傷心又憤怒，但妳深知妳無法說服他事情真的並沒有他想像中那麼嚴重，畢竟他是學院裡的助教，說話一定比妳有力。這不是一場可以用理理解的爭執，而妳穩佔下風。

妳陷入了人生中最困難的時期。妳用盡力氣只想保住妳的學位和妳的婚約，兩項生而為人只要得到了便合格的資歷。要是妳真的無法畢業、無法結婚，妳的生命還有什麼可以憑恃？妳情緒混亂得幾乎無法思考，還好過了不久，他就對妳說：我們一定會結婚的，我會照顧妳。妳哭著答應：原來人在諸多痛苦過後迎來最快樂的消息，居然第一個反應就是大哭。妳做到了，什麼塞翁失馬，什麼否極泰來，都是真的。在延遲畢業的後半年裡，妳一頭栽進婚禮計劃裡，居然忍得過同時補課和重寫論文之苦。和好後他對妳寬容了許多，見妳肯按時補課，他就幫妳整理好論文草稿

的參考書目表和格式，為妳分憂。他在宿舍房間裡埋頭幫妳改論文時，妳就坐在床上幫他挑選妳認為最適合的婚紗攝影師和禮服，男耕女織，一時風平浪靜，那麼純粹。

妳把他專注地改著論文的背影拍照放到網上，讓大家看見他是多麼的用功，並真誠地慶幸自己選擇了一個不覺得讀書是苦差的男友，幫妳度過那般難過的日子。老實說，他如此努力地進修，也真是不容易：今時今日，大學生已經不是天之驕子了，連在石牆樹和鄧志昂樓牌坊對面馬路的外賣薄餅店都叫「薄餅博士」的年代，一個學士學位只是白領階層的基本入場券。既然他終要成為一個負責養家的丈夫，他的學歷高一點對妳來說也是好事。妳聽說很多人都把研究院當作延遲畢業、逃避現實的手段，他好像也說過想讀博士，妳也不記得清楚了。不過，妳以為他作為一個男人，面對世界他至少會比妳勇敢一點。後來妳才發現，原來他也不過是個懦弱的人。

光是由港大東閘到西營盤站之間、不到十五分鐘路程的那段般咸道上，至少有十二間地產舖。在他向妳求婚後的某個晚上，他看著地產舖不管日夜都亮著燈的櫥窗裡的呎數和價錢，然後問妳，如果我們有了小孩，妳會怎樣做呢。當然是馬上辭職當全職媽媽，等你請工人來幫我照顧小孩啊，兩房單位加工人房，大家都有私人空間，是對小孩最好的選擇吧，妳說。他仍看著那些呎數和價錢，沒有作聲，也就是說他並無異議。妳看著滿街由外傭領著的狗、由嫁給外國人的華人女子領著的混血小孩、由大陸研究生領著的大陸研究生，一一在外僱中介公司、窗簾舖和議員辦公室門外走過，妳很高興他有想過妳和他的未來，那個有婚姻、有後代的未來，看來妳當時選擇追求他是個非常正確的決定。

那時妳不知道他居然會喜歡像她那種愛讀書的女生。在分手以後

妳一度非常在意他有否後悔為了她而拋棄妳，不斷用各種方法打聽他和她的近況，希望抓到任何即使微小、模糊的證據，證明他和她在一起以後並沒有過得更好。可是呢，他似乎沒有什麼不快樂的跡象，跟她一起搬到英國後他在那邊的大學找到研究工作，一樣可以幫教授寫論文，還有時間參加學術會議、為報名博士課程做準備。妳不清楚對他這種學術水平的人來說，在外國的大學裡找到工作是不是非常容易的事，畢竟聘請他的英國教授也有意當他的博士論文指導老師；但妳總覺得他的事業之所以能如此一帆風順，一定是她在背後做了什麼手腳。妳對他真是太失望了。他居然成為了這樣的一個透過愛情去依附比自己高學歷的人的男子，一和她在一起就飛上枝頭變鳳凰。妳甚至有理由懷疑，他會和她在一起，只是因為想她幫他完成論文、輕易得到一個博士學位吧？難道他真的像她那樣，為了無法丈量的知識而讀書嗎？

要是別人知道他居然是個這樣膽怯又愛攀龍附鳳的人，又會怎樣評價妳看男人的品味呢？畢竟妳曾經多麼興高采烈地在眾人面前展露對嫁給這個男人的期待，就算大家知道妳和他最終解除了婚約，也無法洗去妳曾經選擇把一生託付給他這一點。事後妳回想那次和他一起在般咸道看地產舖，他應該不是在想怎樣和妳建立一個家庭，而是被樓價嚇壞了。風一吹來，自石牆樹頂垂著的榕樹氣根就隨風搖擺，明明它們看起來那麼堅實，還是一吹就動。妳沒有想過妳和他七年多的愛情，就這樣輕易的輸了給他的恐懼和一個博士學位。

記憶那麼深長，在妳忙著戀愛之時無聲無息的建立起來，到刻意要遺忘的時候，才發現每一個看似微不足道的細節都已落地生根，而且根深柢固，要把依附的物事全數拆毀才能根除。妳無論

何時何地也總覺得他仍在妳身邊，在妳那不再常常收到他訊息的手機另一端，在妳和他一起看過的地產舖地下那隻招財貓的眼裡，在街道的車聲和風聲裡，在「薄餅博士」對面的那兩棵石牆樹下，無論夢裡醒裡，只要妳一個人靜下來，他或她或那兩棵該死的樹就會出現在妳眼前，一眨一眨的，轉述著那些關於妳愛情失敗的耳語。殺人是犯法的，隨意砍樹也是，但妳仍是不甘心，仍是每天特地走到般咸道，拿鎖匙割那兩棵細葉榕的樹幹，並積極把自己的網絡足跡全部刪除，不讓那些談論妳的人有可以憑恃的證據。

要是這兩棵樹可以被砍掉就好了。人類確是很健忘的，只要改變地景，一切就能忘記，以前妳和他在般咸道上常常光顧的「蛇竇」樂香園咖啡室也早就搬回中環，現在也沒有誰記得在現址是地產舖的地方曾經賣過他最喜歡吃的雞批和滑蛋叉燒飯。那次他的臉上沾了雞批的碎屑、妳伸手去幫他抹時，他握住妳的手吻了妳的手心，要不是妳經過中環的「蛇竇」也不會想起。關於記憶的腦神經科學雖然複雜，但只要改變物理環境，還是可以很有效地阻止別人記起對妳不利的事。地鐵港島線的西營盤站和香港大學站開到般咸道來，也幫助妳淘汰了許多往日的記憶。在還沒有地鐵的日子，要從港大往港島的東面需要坐23號巴士，往港島南區要坐另一方向的90B，要去旺角又要到另一個巴士站坐970巴士，每一個巴士站都記得妳和他在妳仍是中學生時往不同地點的約會，妳和他在約會時吃過什麼、買過什麼，他在多晚的時候才送妳回家，遠遠的看著妳走進電梯大堂才離開，不讓妳落單也不讓妳家的看更看見，杜絕被妳媽發現妳和他在一起的事。妳當然沒有辦法殺死一個巴士站，但地鐵來到以後，大家不管是要往北角、旺角還是海怡半島，都只需要坐上東行的港島線再轉車就行，巴士站的人龍短了很多，會因為情景而想起妳和他也曾一起排隊等巴士的人也就少了許多。然而那兩棵可惡的樹，卻沒有一

併消失，向每一個路過般咸道的人當著沉靜的證人，證明妳曾經和他在樹下如此甜蜜地對望，以不再成立的未婚夫和未婚妻身份。

妳和她，以前當同學時也曾經一起在般咸道等過巴士。那時候妳沒有想過她在外國可以跳那麼多級、那麼快讀完博士學位，她回來香港時妳才剛訂婚、看著他幫妳改論文，而妳已經是博士後研究員了。老實說，妳和她在中學時並不熟，可是既然妳要辦一個讓大家都羨慕的婚禮，何不找在妳的中學同學之間最受歡迎的人當妳的伴娘呢？那時她是學校的大明星，既是田徑隊隊員、風紀，成績又好、性格又隨和，當年她因為太聰明而往外國跳級讀書的事，到現在還不時被同學及師妹們當作傳奇來談論。當然，現在回想，妳就知道妳想得太天真了。妳當然知道妳不可以找一個比妳漂亮的人當伴娘，而她的眼睛比妳小、臉比妳圓、身材比妳扁平，妳很放心在美貌方面她不可能搶走妳的風頭。妳在中學畢業的謝師宴上被同學們一致推舉為最有資格選港姐的人，雖然妳沒有真的跑去參選，可是看著那些什麼青少年雜誌的校花校草選舉時，妳也不覺得妳的外表會輸給那些入選的女生。妳甚至真的覺得，像他那樣內向、低調的小書生，能得到妳主動追求，也真的算幸運了——然而他最終居然因為她而放棄妳，妳真沒想過他的價值觀會如此奇特。

妳其實在畢業以後就和她斷了聯絡，到她回港後妳才在同學聚會上和她再次見面，就算是邀請她當妳的伴娘後，妳也總覺得和她對話的語境像公函而非私人書信。當時妳會選擇請並非交心好友的她當伴娘，無法否認也只是為了虛榮感：妳搶先所有中學同學，成為第一個宣布訂婚的人，而且妳才廿三歲就訂婚了，比跳級讀書的她或是那個在中學時就開始寫專欄的誰厲害多了。像她那麼聰明、讀那麼多書的人，也願意在以妳為主角的婚禮上，俯

身為妳拖起婚紗的裙襪，難道不像英國那兩個年輕的皇妃一樣能傲視全場嗎？妳在腦裡預演過好多次她垂頭拖著妳的婚紗走在妳身後的畫面，以及想像過妳的同學們和師妹們看見以前的大明星當妳的配角時，她們會發出怎樣的讚嘆。真的沒想過她這樣的愛情居然會是大團圓結局呢，她們會說。我也希望能像她那麼找到可以託付終生的丈夫呢，她們會說。她能請到那樣的天才來當她的伴娘真是難得，她們會說。妳光是想著，已經笑得眼角都掛滿笑紋。

那絕不是什麼瘋狂的想像。學校是一種培育耳語、讓故事持續流傳的溫床，再多年前畢業的校友、傳過的醜聞，只要兩個來自同一所學校的人碰面，就能馬上重翻舊帳。般咸道上諸多的校園都有公開讓路人探看的空隙，聖保羅的泳池、港大的老樹、英皇的噴水池、禮賢會的古老大樓、聖士提反的花園、般咸道官立小學的旋轉樓梯，都仍帶有許多可供耳語填滿的想像空間，走在路上，大家都認得路上的學生從哪間學校裡來，許多鬼故事和是非在空中飄落到好奇的耳內。誰在水運會上展露出和年齡不符合的成熟身材，哪個自命不凡的小師妹對同是校友的音樂老師不禮貌；哪間男校出身的藝人以前在學校欺凌過誰，哪個立法會議員以前來自哪間學校，後來又發表過哪些令人咋舌的言論。哪對形跡可疑的男教師，在離職以後各自過著怎樣的生活，都仍在所有曾經在般咸道附近上學的人口中流傳著。妳的婚禮有了像她那樣的傳奇人物當配角，誰又會忍得住不談論呢？妳訂婚後馬上發起的那次中學同學聚會，話題全都圍繞著妳的婚訊，妳當眾邀請她當妳伴娘後所有人都陷入對婚禮的興奮，幾乎沒有空間容納別人對她久別回港的問候。新娘和新生嬰兒一樣永遠是主角，而妳非常享受這角色。有了她當妳的伴娘，妳的婚禮一定能成為被人傳頌的大事。

那時在同學聚會上，妳還說過要叫他幫沒有男朋友的她找個對

象，結果呢，在妳和他分手的會談裡，居然會是她當妳和他之間的調解人。她到底是怎樣介入妳和他之間的呢？明明她在答應當妳伴娘以後才在妳介紹之下認識他，就算在姊妹兄弟團的聯誼聚餐裡，二人也只會一本正經地討論研究院的話題，正襟危坐。言談間妳完全看不出他們之間有任何情感上的連繫，甚至有點相信他真的從她那種學術天才身上受了什麼感召，真的要追求一個讀很多書的人生。還是他們當時這樣的對話，只是為他後來跟妳提出分手而刻意安排的伏線？她給妳的解釋，的確是說他重新審視過他的人生規劃，決定不那麼早結婚，改為到外國尋找讀博士及繼續發展事業的機會。他都三十歲了，三十歲結婚還早嗎？一個從那麼早就開始準備的借口，妳要怎樣拆穿？

當她向妳轉述他悔婚的決定時，他已經遠遠的躲在外國了，只有他的父母、妳的母親和她在場。不敢親自說分手的男人，還有什麼用？她站在妳和他之間，說他不想和妳直接對質，即使緣份結束，也想好來好去。妳說，妳和他是什麼時候開始背叛我的？她堅持她沒有背叛妳，並用電視劇裡假裝關心的社工語氣說，妳的母親讀過由他當律師的母親寫的協議書、已經同意由雙方家長平分無法退回的婚禮經費；考慮到退婚對妳的名聲會有所影響，如果取消婚禮的經濟負擔太沉重，男方願意多負擔部分費用，只希望妳和他可以和平分手。妳問她憑什麼代表他說這些。妳說，妳和他睡過了嗎？妳說，妳到底用了什麼方法讓他忽然變心？妳母親拉住妳，不讓妳衝上去抓破她的醜臉。

誰都希望自己喜歡的人是正義的一方。天秤的一邊是完美的她和護著她的雙方家長，天秤的另一邊是崩潰大叫的妳，任誰都會認為妳的失戀是自找的。明明分手前不久，他還問過妳：妳流產那時痛嗎？流了很多血嗎？那時妳瞞著妳媽媽到大陸的醫院進行流產後的治療，可怕嗎？妳說當然可怕，當然痛啊，那是非常傷身

的事情，那時就算你從美國的研討會趕回來，我的手術也已經完成了。你讓我的身體經歷那麼重大的創傷，要是你婚後對我不好，你就死定了，妳撒著嬌說。那時候他看起來那麼哀傷。現在，他自由了。妳最終還是在那張他已經簽妥的協議書上簽名，聲明妳已經和他解除婚約，並承諾日後妳不會再直接主動聯絡他，各走各路。妳一簽完，妳媽就拉著妳離開律師樓，彷彿妳是個剛離開法庭的罪犯。妳到底要怎樣向所有知道妳和他訂過婚的人解釋呢？妳應該怎樣才能把妳在大家心中的形象扭轉為對妳有利的模樣呢？妳可以說服眾人妳是自願解除婚約、而不是如此狼狽地被拋棄嗎？妳在腦裡迅速設計了許多說詞，但沒有一種真正天衣無縫。離開律師樓的路上，妳看見了好多好多的石牆樹，氣根垂落成千成萬的視線，每一片樹葉都在對妳指指點點。看看那個被男人始亂終棄的可憐女子，那些氣根說。她怎麼可能會以為她能瞞騙所有人，那些樹葉說。她不可能真的相信她在此事裡沒有做錯吧，那些在石牆上的樹根說。妳忍不住大叫，想摔什麼，但街上只有因為妳情緒太激動而側目的路人。夠了。妳不想再在人前出現了。妳媽直接攔下一架的士，讓妳可以在車廂裡一路哭到回家。

在解除婚約後妳從所有朋友處打聽他和他的近況，她在看著妳簽完協議書後便回英國工作，還和正在找讀博士的機會的他和他妹妹三人一起住在他父母在英國買的房子裡，親密得像家人。妳聽說她不打算生小孩——他不是很喜歡小孩的嗎，妳對妳的朋友們說。他居然為了依附像她那樣的學者而放棄想生孩子的願望？他真的那麼懼怕畢業後要在職場上找工作養家的前景嗎，妳對漸漸不再回應妳的朋友們說。他其實沒有害怕畢業的理由：他的父母都是律師，手上有不少在般咸道或更高貴的地段的物業收租，他就算不供養父母，父母也不會餓死，甚至可以靠父蔭安穩地度過一生。難道他決定繼續讀書，真的是因為像她那種怪人對學術

的追求嗎？可是就算妳真的知道了真相，妳又有勇氣告訴世人他和妳分手的真相嗎？

妳知道和妳同代的人，都在偷偷談論妳解除婚約的事。妳無法否認這是妳自招的惡果：要是這些年來妳沒有如此高調而且頻繁地放閃，或是沒有邀請像她那樣受注目的人當妳的伴娘，也許在妳和他分手後，妳還可以保有一些靜靜地療傷及重新出發的私隱，可是一切都已經太遲了。妳和他在七年多的戀愛期間，已經由妳親手種下了太多的記憶和戀愛的物證，每一項都像榕樹的氣根，已化成難以根除的一枝枝樹幹。妳在無力自辯以後終於疏遠了和妳同代的所有人，不讓她們各種有心或無意的言行提醒妳那一切耳語和傷痛。難道要等全部人都死光，妳才會被原諒嗎？一八幾幾年活著的那代香港人已經死光了，也就沒有誰記得般咸其實就是香港第三任總督文咸，除了喜歡在同學聚會上賣弄知識破壞氣氛的妳——不過殺人是犯法的，殺一個人還是殺一代人都是。而妳就算再怎樣用鎖匙刮那兩棵樹，它們還是靜靜的站在那裡，不容許妳被遺忘。

妳和他不是一起在那樹下山盟海誓過的嗎？妳和他不是曾經一起渡過那一切的苦難嗎？妳被妳媽拉到相熟的泰國寺廟裡強制禪修三個月，想讓妳可以找到心靈的療癒和平靜。但就算妳遠在外國的神明面前，不許用手機或電腦、每天都得依時間表作息和參加禪修，心裡還是無法排除一切的哀傷和仇恨，仍一直想著般咸道那兩棵該死的樹，期望香港會刮起一個十號風球，把它們吹倒。被颱風吹倒算是無法以法律追究的 act of God 吧？陪著妳禪修的妳媽並不知道妳在那三個月裡每天都祈求香港打風，妳也不知道妳媽篤信的神會不會為還未是信徒的妳實現那樣重大的願望，可

是當妳回到香港時，就在新聞裡看見那兩棵樹被政府砍掉了。

妳趕到般咸道的「薄餅博士」前，看著對面馬路的港大鄧志昂樓圍牆，兩棵八十幾歲的老樹被清理得那麼乾淨，一條樹根也沒有留下來。妳哭了。妳的願望居然實現了。現場原來有記者在，問妳是不是因為捨不得那樹而痛哭，妳沒有回應，記者就當她的猜想無誤，還把「街坊因為不捨得兩棵老樹當街痛哭」寫進網上新聞裡了。擋路的樹連樹根都被徹底挖掉，工人在原來被樹依附的地方，填滿了新鮮的水泥、石磚和欄杆，企圖讓人造結構看起來不曾被石牆樹擾亂，也杜絕了石牆樹再從牆裡長出新枝的可能性。當然，那些新填進去的物料，還是有點明顯的歪歪斜斜，也未有圍牆其他部分被風雨和年月刷上的老舊顏色，只能像新長出嫩肉的傷疤那樣，以明顯較淺的顏色保護著剛剛密合的重創。那邊的行人路重新變得寬闊，一對女大學生輕鬆地並肩走過原本被樹幹擋著的地方，不需要側身，也沒有轉過去看那曾經有樹的位置，彷彿對她們來說，那裡從來都是沒有樹的平凡行人路，也沒有妳和他曾經拍過婚紗照的記憶。

這應該就是妳被集體記憶赦免的開端。那段戀情裡有太多妳不敢想起的事，也有太多妳不願意被別人知道的真相。妳實在不願意承認在妳被教授指控抄襲後妳向他假稱懷孕，只是為了使他不跟妳分手。你是男人的話就要負上責任，我們已經訂了婚，你絕不可以離開我，妳說。明明在冷戰中的他讀到妳的訊息後馬上打電話給妳，並說，我們一定會結婚的，我會照顧妳。妳沒有想過那樣的謊言可以如此有效地使你們和好，老實說，妳也沒有想過他會上當。妳要求他在三個月內保守妳已有孕的秘密、連彼此的父母也不能通知，並非因為胎兒會小器的習俗，而是為了方便妳在說謊一個月後、他剛好陪老闆到美國參加研討會時，假裝流產、要到大陸醫院刮宮，就算他想馬上坐廿八小時飛機趕回來

照顧妳，也因為妳「在大陸的手機網絡無法和香港聯絡」，無法成事。妳要求他絕對不能向外人說妳曾經流產，說是怕他的父母會介意而阻止你們結婚：你不會因為這樣而丟下我的吧，我們的婚紗照都公開了，大家都知道你會娶我的，妳說。他抱著妳答應了。

妳真的以為他不知道妳是假裝懷孕的嗎，她在律師樓裡這樣跟妳說。妳那才知道他早就發現了。是她告訴他的嗎？她那麼聰明，就算她在讀博士期間學會了分辨誰曾經流產而誰沒有，妳也不會覺得稀奇，畢竟讀那麼多書的人總是像英雄電影裡的超級壞人一樣，擅長用自己的各種專業知識毀掉英雄主角的一生。一定是她告訴他妳假裝流產的事了。像她那樣想介入妳和他之間的人，要是握住了如此有力的把柄，又怎麼不會利用這樣的事來離間妳和他？明明要是他一開始就跟妳攤牌，妳還有自辯或道歉的機會，妳和他都已經經歷過那麼多的苦難和考驗，一個在妳情急之下為了留住他而衝口而出的謊言，真的會讓他下定決心和妳永遠決裂嗎？她在妳背後通風報信，不就是為了要把妳置於無法自辯的境地，並讓她保有從旁煽風點火、乘虛而入的空間嗎？為了從妳手中把他搶走，她到底下了多少機心？我從沒想過妳會向他通風報信，妳對她說。我和妳認識那麼多年了，妳和他也是因為我介紹才會知道對方，妳居然為了他而不顧我和妳多年的情誼？妳說，妳和他是什麼時候開始背叛我的？妳說，妳和他睡過了嗎？妳說，妳到底用了什麼方法讓他忽然變心？妳在律師樓裡緊握的拳頭氣得發抖，同時不知是因為憤怒還是哀傷的淚水直流，劃過兩頰，直直地滴在深紅色的木頭會議桌上，閃閃發光。

其實他的同事在妳假裝流產時，拍到妳在香港的酒吧喝醉了、和男生親密地共舞的短片，她說得很平靜。房間的空氣凝固。他給過妳一個機會講真相，但妳還是選擇騙他，他就無法忍下去了。

妳想起他問過妳：妳流產那時痛嗎？流了很多血嗎？妳說當然可怕，當然痛啊，妳說。那時候他看起來那麼哀傷。原來他已經知道了。

對了，她說。其實我是他妹妹的未婚妻。他並沒有對不起妳，我也沒有。

從那時起妳就一直在刮那兩棵石牆樹。她徹底地清白，而妳沒有可以自辯的餘地。妳一直刮一直刮那兩棵樹，想把身上的污點全部刮去，但妳無論怎麼刮也無法從世上把那兩棵樹刮走。到底她有沒有告訴那個房間外的別人這一切真相？到底那些曾經見證妳邀請她當伴娘的人，會不會從她口中問出一些線索來？妳當時那麼高調地演出自己的幸福愛情，到最後只能假裝和他因為無法向外人言明但非關妳的過失的原因而和平分手，大家真的會相信嗎？妳真的寧願大家都忘記妳曾經有過的這一段情，好讓所有人都不再注視妳那充滿罪名的過去。可是要怎樣做才能把已經傳送到眾人記憶裡的婚紗照、放閃照等都一一刪除？找另一個人結婚、用新的故事和影像蓋過他和妳的故事嗎？把到處都能勾起眾人記憶的般咸道放火燒毀嗎？把和妳同代的每一個同學和朋友都殺掉嗎？殺人和放火都是犯法的，而妳並不相信妳可以輕易找到別人來和妳製作新的愛情影像。除了刮樹以外，妳沒事可做。

於是那兩棵樹被政府砍了時，妳真是再快樂不過了。砍樹是犯法的，除非砍樹的人是政府。那麼老的樹本來還能活上許許多多年，實在是不該留它活口那麼久的。政府說那兩棵樹本來就有倒下的危險，雖然妳怎麼用力刮它都傷不了它的皮毛，但妳也不在乎真相了。連那裡深入牆壁和地底的樹根都被挖走處死了，就再也不會那兩個巨大的證人，讓所有路過的人都能聯想起妳和他的事了。

樹曾經生長的痕跡，已經被水泥抹去，只要給它一些日曬雨淋的時日，就連新塗上去的物料都會完美地和老舊的部分接在一起，無法分辨。也許那時，妳就能自這一切侮辱中重生了。兩棵石牆樹被砍了，可是後面山坡的陰影仍落在般咸道上，像一種鬼魂一樣，代替原本長在石牆樹上的氣根籠罩著凹陷的牆、牆上新鮮的水泥，還未夠暗的天色還未能把欲蓋彌彰的水泥隱去，還有讓知情者想起那兩棵樹的可能性。

等待吧。等待見過那兩棵樹的人都老去，等待她們各自陷入更大的快樂和醜聞之中，等待世界一點一點的變幻，把妳的醜聞壓到不再使人覺得有趣的歷史深處。妳無法殺死每一個記得的人，但妳可以等待他們遺忘。妳繼續沿般咸道往中環方向走，經過轉過幾次手的茶餐廳、已經改賣紅酒的乳酪雪糕店、總是說要結業清貨但十幾年後才終於結了業的時裝店，妳開始慢慢相信遺忘的可能；近聖士提反女子中學那邊的般咸道上，那四棵被砍去的細葉榕在石牆上留下了樹根，切口處長出了好多水橫枝，像爆炸頭髮型一般茂密，正好盛綠。風一吹過，像眼睛又像嘴唇的細葉榕樹葉，又再次在妳頭頂沙啦沙啦，妳抬頭，但無法辨清誰人說了什麼。

原刊於香港文學館「我街道，我知道，我書寫」計劃網頁，後收錄於香港文學館主編：《我香港，我街道》（新北：木馬文化，2020）。

前進進戲劇工作坊曾改編此作為戲劇作品《根從你空中走過》，2023年6月14日於香港首演。

根深

/ Deep-Rooted

Translated by Jennifer Feeley

When she told you that he really wanted to break up with you, you only heard the whirling of leaves in the sky, softly whispered conversations. Those two stone wall trees growing on the outer wall of Bonham Road at the University of Hong Kong, their aerial roots drooping down into thousands of gazes, leaves blinking and blinking, then rustling and rustling, sprinkled their powdery whispers onto Bonham Road. You looked up, but couldn't make out who said what. The fluorescent tubes that were so white they were nearly blue cast a fleeting interplay of light and shadow in your eyes. You weren't beneath the trees, nor on Bonham Road, and what was real was her, inside the lawyer's office, uttering those verdict-like words.

In fact, it wasn't just a breakup, but an affront to marriage. You originally thought it was merely an excuse from her, who was supposed to be your maid of honor, to throw you a surprise bachelorette party—a somewhat inauspicious excuse, but you knew she was the kind of weirdo who always kept her nose buried in books, completely oblivious to social conventions. At the time, you and he had already taken wedding photos. You'd planned out a weight-loss program, scheduled hair removal treatments, and booked a bridal makeup artist. Your bridesmaids had all been fitted

for their bridesmaids' dresses. The photo of the engagement ring captioned with "I said yes" in English announced your wedding news to the world. In everyone's eyes, you and he were already one. You asked her if she was the third person between you and him, but she refused to admit it. Then you saw your mother looking at you, not daring to gaze directly at her or his parents, signaling for you to sign the dissolution of engagement agreement on the table that he'd already signed earlier.

You didn't know they'd already become so close that she could speak on his behalf.

Wounding someone with a knife was illegal, and honestly, you had neither the guts nor the confidence to stab either of them with your own strength. And so, you began concocting excuses to pass by Bonham Road every day, stealthily using an old key to vigorously scratch the bark of the stone wall trees, a literal embodiment of the idiom to cut a large tree with a small knife. Of course, the trees may not have suffered any significant damage from your attacks, and even if you exerted more force, at most, you could only leave superficial scratches on the old, thick bark, not even inflicting as much damage as the selfish lovesick fools who carved their names into trees. You used to be extremely fond of these two banyan trees. When taking wedding photos with him, you even specifically asked him to stand beneath the trees while you sat on the ancient wall that the trees parasitized, all the white tulle, lace, embroidery, and beading on your huge skirt cascading down, following the winding trunk, gazing at him who was gazing up at you. Wedding photos, serving as evidence of the pinnacle of

love for generations to come, invariably had to incorporate some historically significant elements as everlasting symbols. Since the two of you met at the University of Hong Kong, established during the colonial era, having these two old trees outside the campus gates bear witness to your marriage was quite appropriate.

That was such a difficult spot to take pictures: the over-eighty-year-old banyan trees grew outside the walls of the Tang Chi Ngong Building at the University of Hong Kong, their thick and twisty roots tightly grasping the low wall and ancient railings, occupying most of the sidewalk outside the wall that was already so narrow that two people could barely walk side by side. Usually, pedestrians had to walk single file under the trees, squeezing sideways through the gap between the tree trunks and the pedestrian guardrail. As a result, many people opted to walk on the wider sidewalk across the street in front of King's College and PHD Pizza. Bonham Road, which was between two sidewalks, had two lanes for vehicles. Double-decker buses heading east and west, private cars traveling to Cyberport or luxury residences in the Mid-Levels, and motorbikes delivering takeout from nearby restaurants continuously passed in front of the camera. Your wedding photographer stood on the sidewalk on the King's College side, nearly forgetting that his profession didn't permit him to lose his temper. Fortunately, the photographer found a spot on the platform of the Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong on the corner slope, enabling him to take shots of Bonham Road from a higher angle. He switched to a long lens, like those used by paparazzi for distant candid shots, capturing the moment of the two of you gazing at each other under the old trees. The sidewalk outside of

King's College was crowded with passersby taking pictures of you with their cell phones, and you didn't mind at all. It probably felt like being a superstar watched by dozens of cameras on the red carpet.

Even after overcoming such a difficult photoshoot and more hardships together, why did your love with him ultimately end in disappointment? When you selected the wedding photos together and placed them in the wedding invitations designed as mini photo albums, he looked at the series of shots you took in front of various stone wall trees around Sai Wan, seeming quite happy. At the time, he appeared preoccupied, but since he was smiling, you didn't dwell on it. These were your wedding photos, the most important portraits in your life, promotional photos that defined to the world whether your marriage was beautiful and elegant. In those pictures, you were clearly beaming with joy.

Destroying all public records related to your stillborn marriage was practically impossible. You could delete the wedding information posted online, and cancel all booked dates, venues, and services, but you couldn't make the photos taken of your wedding dress on Bonham Road that day disappear from people's cell phones, nor could you make everyone who knew about it forget how you were jumping for joy about the wedding. You posted a black-and-white solo photo on social media, vaguely stating that after much consideration, the two of you decided to part ways and seek happiness individually, wishing each other well, pretending to be calm and composed, like a celebrity divorce announcement. Your bridesmaids and friends cautiously reached out or inquired

about the situation. At first, you were eager to defend yourself, but gradually, you came to realize that no one would believe you. You were well aware that everyone was exchanging their guesses about the inside story of your broken engagement. You didn't know how many of them knew the truth. Then you just wanted everyone, including yourself, to forget that you and he had once been a couple. You tossed the engagement ring into the sea in Kennedy Town, and took the stuffed toys, perfume, books, and travel souvenirs that he gave you to the dump, not wanting to keep anything that might remind you of the past. The most difficult to get rid of was the huge oil painting of your wedding portrait that was included in the wedding photography package. Originally, you planned to place it at the entrance of your wedding banquet, then hang it in the bedroom of your new home, blessing and protecting your marriage from being disturbed by outsiders. After you threw the oil painting away at the dump, a nosy neighbor passing by happened to see it, even taking a photo and uploading it to the public Facebook group for Sai Wan residents. The online commenters either speculated about and mocked your engagement at length, or feigned sympathy, pasting lyrics from Kay Tse's "Wedding Invitation Street" or Denise Ho's "Wood Grain." One of your old friends privately told you about the incident of netizens making fun of your wedding oil painting. In shame and anger, you blocked that old friend and that Facebook group. But what good was that? Countless netizens you didn't even know had already seen the evidence of your embarrassment, and they recognized the backdrop where you took your wedding photos beneath the stone wall trees at the Tang Chi Ngong Building on Bonham Road, which was familiar to all the neighbors. Were you trying not only to cut

down the trees with a key but also silence everyone in Sai Wan who knew about these trees? Countless voices, whirling shadows of trees. When you closed your eyes, you could hear those faint, faint sounds, hovering by your ears like mosquitoes.

* * *

You never imagined that your romance with him would end like this. You also never imagined that he would end up with *her*, who'd happened to come back to Hong Kong. Back in high school, you knew that you and her, who skipped grades and quickly earned a PhD overseas, were two completely different creatures, but at the time, you didn't care, as you had no interest in being a scholar. In your envisioned life, all you wanted was to obtain an undergraduate degree from the University of Hong Kong and find an able-bodied husband with decent features who was honest, ambitious, and family-oriented and become a competent housewife, two main tasks you should've fulfilled as a human, but all this turned out to be harder than anticipated. When you met him, he was your private tutor. You didn't like studying, but you liked him. After winning him over, you kept your relationship a secret from your mom, only telling her after you were admitted to university. At first, your mom was skeptical, saying your relationship wouldn't last, but after he graduated with a master's degree and found a university teaching assistant position, when your mom accompanied the two of you for graduation photos, she hinted to him that it was time for him to settle down with you.

In your third year of university, as expected, he proposed

to you. You immediately announced your engagement online for the world to see, and hundreds of friends congratulated you on the internet, even old classmates you'd forgotten about resurfacing. Memories are always so deeply ingrained; you hadn't forgotten how your high school classmates discussed the future of your relationship with him when they found out you were together. Him being with a sixteen-year-old-girl—could it really be true love? A student like you who merely settled for passing grades, together with a university teaching assistant—were the two of you really compatible? Why would a young girl like you be so eager to date a man so much older—what did you really want? How many relationships that started in high school could survive after all involved parties graduated from university? Those softly whispered conversations were like streetlights shining through the gaps of the banyan leaves, landing right in front of the points of your toes. You couldn't pinpoint which leaf blocked the light, but with every step, shadows fell upon you, filling you with resentment.

You could only assume that no one ever believed in your love story, and you constantly endeavored to showcase your happiness with him in every way. You documented in photos every meal the two of you shared, every good morning or good night message he sent you, every time you went window shopping, watched movies, drank bubble tea, or rode the MTR or bus together, uploading them so that anyone who wanted to see could witness how blissful the two of you were. As long as you continuously provided the gossipmongers with evidence that the two of you were still happily together, other people's criticisms of your relationships wouldn't carry any weight. And now, with

the engagement ring he gave you adorning your left ring finger, there was even less they could say. On social media, you vaguely mentioned that your relationship with him hadn't been all smooth sailing, yet the ring he placed on your ring finger served as proof to all the naysayers that your love could overcome all the idle gossip. Perhaps some of the people who gossiped about you or were actually innocent bystanders liked your post, making you feel vindicated; after all, as the saying went, tall trees catch the wind, and there would always be people who delighted in seeing you struggle. Your way of fighting back was to consistently display your happiness and beauty to everyone.

In your fourth year of university, your life suddenly took a turn for the worse. Your professor accused your graduation thesis of being plagiarized, and your attendance rate for your tutorial sections was insufficient. The department required you to delay graduation by a year to rewrite your thesis and make up the missed class hours. Your peers from the same year had all secured positions as bank management trainees or arranged to take various civil service exams. Even your history major classmates who you thought were least likely to find jobs had secured positions as research assistants or in bank archive departments. Only you were still entangled with the university's graduation requirements. With every piece of news that a friend received a job offer, it felt like you were being interrogated why you were lagging behind; you felt so ashamed that you just wanted to hide, but everyone's greetings and good news pierced your ears. When you were halfway through rewriting your thesis, it was the season when high schoolers were planning to take photos in their graduation gowns. You tried hard

to pretend that you'd voluntarily postponed your graduation in order to diligently complete your thesis. Every day on social media, you shared photos of your desk filled with reference materials and coffee, along with famous sayings from celebrities and scholars about academic pursuits that you found online. You wouldn't give them any reason to look down on you, but news spread like wildfire, and you vaguely heard that some people seemed to have seen through your lies. However, you couldn't confirm the source of the information and could only continue to pretend that nothing had happened, feigning great interest in your thesis topic. At one point, you even falsely claimed that you intended to develop your thesis into a master's research topic, which was utterly absurd.

This minor alleged plagiarism incident turned out to be the biggest crisis in your relationship with him. He surprisingly agreed with your professor, thinking that taking someone else's literature review from a thesis submitted a few years before and modifying its grammar to fit your own thesis was lazy and careless behavior. As long as there is even one member of a university who disregards academic integrity, then every person within the university, the entire city, and even scholars within the entire academic field will not be trusted by the world, he said. You couldn't believe that he, who was already engaged to you at the time, didn't stand by your side, instead echoing outsiders' accusations against you, magnifying such a trivial matter into something of profound significance. It was truly an excessive exaggeration. Obviously, all scholarly articles were but recycled versions of what other people had said, simply presented in different ways. But just because you slightly deviated from these tedious rules, repackaging content

from someone else's paper without much alteration, you were accused of plagiarism and violating academic integrity. How could you have possibly accepted such an unfair rule? Plus, you were just a puny undergraduate student, writing a paper that no one, except your professor, cared about. Making such a tiny transgression sound as though it jeopardized an entire academic field was too much, wasn't it? The argument you had with him was more intense than any you'd ever had before, so intense that you could almost see the end of your relationship looming. You knew he had an unshakeable commitment to certain strange principles, but who would actually break up over something as juvenile as copying homework? You highly suspected he was just looking for an excuse to call off the engagement. You were heartbroken and furious, but you knew you couldn't convince him that the issue wasn't as serious as he'd imagined. After all, he was a university teaching assistant, and his words surely carried more weight than yours. This wasn't a dispute that could be resolved through reasoning, and you were at a disadvantage.

You sank into the most challenging period of your life. You exerted all your effort to save your degree and your engagement, two qualifications considered passing grades in life. If you really couldn't graduate or get married, what else could you rely on in your life? Your emotions were so tumultuous that you could barely think straight. Fortunately, not long after, he told you: We'll definitely get married. I'll take care of you. Tearfully, you said yes. It turned out that your first reaction to receiving the happiest news after so much suffering was to burst into tears. You did it—the sayings about blessings in disguise and it's always darkest before

dawn were all true. In the latter half of your delayed graduation year, you threw yourself into wedding planning, enduring the pain of making up for missed classes and rewriting your thesis at the same time. After the two of you reconciled, he became much more tolerant towards you. Seeing your willingness to make up your classes on time, he helped you clean up the bibliography and formatting of your thesis draft, sharing your load. While he worked on editing your thesis in the dorm room, you sat on the bed, helping him select what you thought were the best wedding photographer and suit, a harmonious division of labor, a moment of calm, so pure.

You took a photo of him from behind as he concentrated on editing your thesis and posted it online, showing everyone how diligent he was. You sincerely rejoiced in having chosen a boyfriend who didn't find studying a chore, helping you get through those difficult days. Honestly, his dedication to further education was truly commendable. Nowadays, university students were no longer the pride and joy of society. In an era where even the takeaway pizza shop across the road from the stone wall trees and the Tang Chi Nong Building arch was named PHD Pizza, obtaining a bachelor's degree was simply a basic ticket for entry into the white-collar realm. Since he eventually was going to become the breadwinner for your family, him having a higher education benefited you as well. You'd heard that many people treated graduate school as a way to delay graduation and escape from reality. It seemed like he might've once mentioned wanting to pursue a PhD—you couldn't remember clearly. However, you thought that as a man, he'd at least be braver than you in facing the

world. It was only later that you discovered he was also nothing more than a coward.

Just between the HKU East Gate and exit C of Sai Ying Pun station, a stretch of Bonham Road that took less than fifteen minutes to traverse by foot, there were at least twelve real estate offices. One evening after he proposed to you, he studied the windows of the real estate offices that were brightly lit whether day or night, observing the square footage and prices displayed within, then asked you, If we had a child, what would you do? Of course, I'd resign immediately to be a full-time mom, waiting for you to hire a helper to assist in taking care of the child—a two-bedroom unit with a helper's room would ensure private space for everyone and would be the best choice for the child, you replied. He continued to examine the square footage and prices, remaining silent, meaning he had no objections. You surveyed the streets filled with foreign domestic helpers walking dogs, ethnically Chinese women married to foreigners walking with their mixed-race children, and mainland Chinese graduate students walking with other mainland Chinese graduate students, passing by employment agencies for foreign domestic workers, curtain shops, and councilors' offices one by one, pleased that he'd been contemplating your future together, a future with marriage and offspring. It seemed that pursuing him back then was indeed the right decision.

At the time, you didn't know that he actually liked girls like her who were passionate about learning. After you broke up, you were deeply concerned about whether he regretted

leaving you for her, constantly using various methods to inquire about their current situation, hoping to grasp even the slightest, vaguest piece of evidence that would prove they weren't happier together. However, he seemed to show no signs of unhappiness. After moving with her to the UK, he found a research position at a university there, assisting a professor in writing papers as before, as well as attending academic conferences and preparing to enroll in a PhD program. You weren't sure if finding a job at a foreign university was an easy task for someone of his academic level—after all, the British professor who hired him also intended to be his PhD dissertation advisor; however, you always had a hunch that the reason his career was progressing so smoothly must've been due to her interference behind the scenes. You were truly disappointed in him. He'd unexpectedly turned into the kind of man who used love to attach himself to someone with a better education, soaring high like a phoenix once he was with her. You even had reason to suspect he was with her just because he wanted her to help him complete his dissertation and easily obtain a doctoral degree, right? Could it be that he truly studied for the sake of immeasurable knowledge, just like she did?

If others knew that he was actually such a timid person who loved riding on others' coattails, how would they judge your taste in men? After all, you once elatedly expressed your eagerness to marry this man in front of everyone. Even if they knew that the two of you eventually called off the engagement, there was no way to erase the fact that you once chose to entrust your life to him. Reflecting on the time when you were both looking at real estate offices on Bonham Road, he probably wasn't thinking

about building a family with you, but instead was shocked by the property prices. When the wind blew, the aerial roots of the banyan trees hanging from the stone wall swayed with it—even though they seemed so sturdy, they moved at the slightest breeze. You never imagined that your relationship with him, which spanned more than seven years, would be so easily lost to his fears and a PhD degree.

* * *

The memories ran so deep, silently forming while you were busy in love. Now, when you deliberately tried to forget, you realized that even the most seemingly insignificant details had taken root, those roots so entrenched that uprooting them would require dismantling everything to which they clung. No matter where or when, you always felt he was still by your side: at the other end of your cell phone that no longer frequently received his messages, in the eyes of the lucky cat who greeted you both on the floor of the real estate office, in the roar of street traffic and the rustle of the wind, beneath those two stone wall trees across from PHD Pizza. Whether in dreams or awake, whenever you were alone and still, he or she or those two damn trees appeared before your eyes, blinking and blinking, recounting whispers of your failed romance. Murder was illegal, and so was random tree-cutting, but you couldn't take it. Day after day, you still made the special trip to Bonham Road, carving the trunks of those two banyan trees with a key, and you actively deleted all traces of your online presence, denying those who gossiped about you from having any concrete evidence.

If only those two trees could've been cut down. Humans were indeed forgetful; just change the landscape, and all can be forgotten. The "snake pit" Lok Heung Yuen Coffee Shop on Bonham Road that the two of you used to frequent had long since moved back to Central. Now, no one remembered that this current location, a real estate office, once sold his favorite chicken pie and eggs with char siu rice. That time when crumbs from the chicken pie stuck to his face, and you reached out to wipe them away, he held your hand and kissed the palm. If you hadn't passed by the "snake pit" in Central, you wouldn't have remembered it, either. While the neuroscience of memory was complex, changing the physical environment could still effectively prevent others from recalling unfavorable things about you. The extension of the MTR Island Line to Sai Ying Pun and HKU stations also helped you erase many past memories. In the days before the MTR, to travel from HKU to the eastern part of Hong Kong Island, you had to take bus number 23. To get to the southern part of Hong Kong Island, it was 90B in another direction. Heading to Mong Kok over on the Kowloon side required going to a different bus stop and taking bus number 970. Each bus stop held memories of the dates you had back when you were still a high school student, bound for different destinations: what you ate, what you bought, how late he escorted you home, watching you enter the building lobby from a distance before leaving, ensuring you weren't left alone and that the security guard wouldn't see him, all to prevent your mom from finding out you were together. Of course, you couldn't kill a bus stop, but since the MTR arrived, whether traveling to North Point, Mong Kok, or South Horizons, everyone simply needed to take the eastbound Island Line and transfer if necessary. The queues at the bus stops

shortened significantly, and thus fewer people would recall the sight of the two of you standing in line, waiting for the bus together. However, those two infuriating trees didn't disappear along with the rest. They stood as silent witnesses to every passerby on Bonham Road, attesting to the once tender gazes the two of you exchanged under them, in the now-defunct roles of fiancé and fiancée.

When she and you were classmates, you'd also wait for the bus together on Bonham Road. Back then, you never imagined she'd be able to skip so many grades and complete her PhD so quickly while studying abroad. By the time she returned to Hong Kong, you'd just gotten engaged and were watching him help you with your thesis revisions, while she was already a postdoctoral researcher. To be honest, you weren't close with her in high school, but since you wanted to put on a wedding that would be the envy of everyone, why not choose the most popular person among your high school classmates to be your maid of honor? In those days, she was the star of the school—a member of the track and field team and a prefect, with good grades and an easygoing personality. The fact that she was so brilliant that she skipped grades to study abroad was still discussed as legendary among your classmates and younger schoolmates to this day. Of course, in hindsight, you realized how naïve you'd been. You naturally knew you couldn't have a maid of honor more beautiful than yourself; her eyes were smaller than yours, her face rounder, her figure less curvaceous. You were confident she wouldn't overshadow your beauty. At your high school graduation banquet, your classmates unanimously deemed you the most qualified candidate to compete in the Miss

Hong Kong pageant. Although you didn't actually participate, when you read about those contests to select campus belles and campus hunks in teen magazines, you didn't feel your looks were inferior to the girls selected. You even genuinely believed that for an introverted and low-key bookworm like him, being pursued by you was a stroke of good fortune—yet, in the end, he chose her over you. You'd never thought his values would be so strange.

You actually lost touch with her after graduation, and only reconnected during a gathering with your classmates when she returned to Hong Kong. Even after inviting her to be your maid of honor, you always felt that your conversations with her were more like formal letters than personal correspondence. At the time, your choice to have her—who wasn't a particularly close friend—as your maid of honor was largely driven by vanity. You'd beaten all your high school classmates, becoming the first to announce a wedding engagement. Moreover, you got engaged at just twenty-three, which was more impressive than her skipping grades or someone who began writing columns during high school. Wouldn't having someone as intelligent and well-educated as her willing to bend down to adjust the train of your wedding gown during the ceremony where you played the starring role make you just like those two young princesses in England, allowing you to turn up your nose at all the attendees? You rehearsed the image in your mind over and over, her head bowed, walking behind you holding the train of your gown, and you also imagined the gasps of admiration your classmates and younger schoolmates would express upon seeing the former star of the school in a supporting role on your big day. Who'd have thought her love story would have

such a fairy-tale ending, they would've said. I also wish I could find a husband to commit to for life, just like her, they would've said. It's a rare feat for her to have such a genius as her maid of honor, they would've said. Just thinking about it, the corners of your eyes crinkled with joy.

That was by no means a wild fantasy. Schools were hotbeds for nurturing whispers and perpetuating stories. Alumni who graduated many years ago and scandals that had been passed on were instantly revisited whenever two individuals from the same school met. Many campuses on Bonham Road had gaps for passersby to peek into; the swimming pool at St. Paul's College, old trees at HKU, the fountain at King's College, the ancient building of the Chinese Rhenish Church, the garden at St. Stephen's Girls' College, and the spiral staircase of Bonham Road Government Primary School all sparked whisper-filled imaginings. Everyone could tell which school the students on the road came from, and numerous ghost stories and rumors drifted through the air, landing in curious ears. Who displayed a mature physique inappropriate for her age at the Swimming Gala? Which self-exclaimed extraordinary younger schoolmate was rude to a music teacher who also happened to be an alumna? Which artist from an all-boys school used to bully someone at school? Which Legislative Council member came from which school and later issued jaw-dropping statements? What kind of lives did that pair of suspicious-looking male teachers lead after they resigned from their positions? All of these stories still circulated among those who once attended school near Bonham Road. With a legendary figure like her as a supporting character in your wedding, who could resist talking

about it? The gathering of your high school classmates you organized right after your engagement revolved entirely around your wedding news. When you publicly invited her to be your maid of honor, everyone became caught up in the excitement of your wedding, leaving hardly any room for inquiries about her return to Hong Kong after a long absence. Like a newborn baby, the bride was always the protagonist, and you thoroughly enjoyed this role. With her as your maid of honor, your wedding was sure to be on everyone's lips.

Back then during your get-together with your classmates, you even mentioned having him help her, who didn't have a boyfriend, find a boyfriend. However, in your breakup discussion with him, much to your surprise, she turned out to be the mediator between the two of you. How exactly did she end up intertwined with your relationship? Clearly, she only got to know him after agreeing to be your maid of honor and being introduced by you. Even during gatherings with your circle of friends, the two of them would only engage in serious discussions about topics related to their academic research, sitting upright and composed. From their conversations, you couldn't detect any emotional connection between them. You even started to believe that he might've been genuinely inspired by her academic brilliance, truly wanting to pursue a life full of learning. Or were their conversations at that time just a pretext deliberately orchestrated for him to break up with you later? The explanation she gave you was that he had reevaluated his life plans, deciding not to marry so early and instead seek opportunities abroad to pursue a PhD and further his career. He was already thirty—was getting married at that age still

considered early? How could you debunk an excuse that had been so long in the making?

When she relayed to you his decision to call off the wedding, he was already hiding far away in a foreign country—only his parents, your mother, and she were present. What use was a man who didn't have the nerve to break up in person? She stood between you and him, saying he didn't want to confront you directly, and even if the relationship was ending, he wanted things to end amicably. You asked, When did the two of you start betraying me? She insisted she hadn't betrayed you, and adopting a tone resembling a concerned social worker from a TV drama, she said, Your mother has read the agreement written by his mother, who's a lawyer, and has agreed to evenly split the non-refundable wedding expenses between both families; considering the impact that canceling the wedding could have on your reputation, if the financial burden of calling off the wedding is too heavy, his side is willing to shoulder a larger portion of the expenses—he only hopes that the two of you can part ways peacefully. You questioned her authority to speak on his behalf. You asked, Did you sleep with him? You asked, What did you do to make him have a sudden change of heart? Your mother held you back, preventing you from rushing up and scratching her hideous face.

Everyone hopes that the person they like stands on the side of justice. On one side of the scales, there was the perfect her, and the two sets of parents who protected her. On the other side of the scale was you, collapsing and shouting in despair. Anyone would've thought your heartbreak was self-inflicted. Not long

before the breakup, he even asked you: Did it hurt when you had the miscarriage? Did you bleed a lot? When you sneaked off to a hospital in the mainland for treatment after your miscarriage without telling your mom, was it scary? You said, Of course it was scary, of course it was painful—it was a very physically taxing ordeal. Even if you would've rushed back from your conference in the US, my surgery would've already been completed. You put my body through such trauma. If you're not good to me after we're married, you're dead meat, you playfully said. At the time, he looked so sad. Now, he was free. In the end, you still signed your name on the prepared agreement that he'd already signed, declaring that your engagement had been dissolved, and vowing you wouldn't initiate direct contact with him in the future, each of you going your own ways. As soon as you finished signing, your mom pulled you out of the lawyer's office as though you were a criminal just leaving the courtroom. How were you going to explain things to everyone who knew the two of you had been engaged? How could you rehabilitate your image in people's eyes? Could you convince everyone that you voluntarily called off the engagement, rather than being abandoned so humiliatingly? You quickly formulated numerous explanations in your mind, but none seemed truly seamless. On your way out of the lawyer's office, you saw several banyan trees, their aerial roots drooping down into thousands of gazes, each leaf pointing at you. Look at that poor girl who was abandoned by a man, the aerial roots said. How could she think she could fool everyone? the leaves said. She can't really believe she did nothing wrong, the tree roots on the stone wall said. You couldn't help but scream, wanting to throw something, but the only reactions on the street were from passersby startled by your

outburst. Enough. You didn't want to be seen in public anymore. Your mom hailed a taxi, allowing you to cry the whole way home inside the vehicle.

After the engagement was broken off, you asked all your friends about the recent situation of her and him. After witnessing you sign the agreement, she returned to work in the UK. She was even living with him, who was searching for PhD opportunities, and his younger sister, the three of them together in a house his parents had bought in the UK, one big happy family. You heard she didn't plan on having kids. But he really likes kids, doesn't he? you said to your friends. Did he really give up his desire to have children just to cling to an academic like her? Is he really that afraid of the prospect of finding a job and supporting a family after graduation? you said to your friends, who gradually stopped responding. He actually had no reason to fear graduation: both of his parents were lawyers, owning several properties for rent on Bonham Road and in even more upscale areas. Even if he didn't support them, his parents wouldn't starve; he could even live the rest of his life comfortably under his father's shadow. Could his decision to continue his studies really be because he shared the academic pursuits of a weirdo like her? But even if you really knew the truth, would you have had the courage to tell the world the truth of why he broke up with you?

* * *

You knew that your contemporaries were secretly discussing your broken engagement. You couldn't deny that this

was a negative outcome of your own making: if you hadn't engaged in such ostentatious and frequent public displays of affection over the years, or if you hadn't asked someone as attention-grabbing as her to be your maid of honor, maybe after you'd broken up with him, you could've still retained some privacy to heal quietly and start anew, but now it was too late. During the seven-plus years of your relationship, you'd planted too many memories and tokens of love with your own hands, each one like the aerial roots of a banyan tree, transformed into indelible trunks. After finding yourself defenseless, you eventually distanced yourself from your contemporaries, not letting their intentional or unintentional remarks remind you of all the whispers and pain. Did you have to wait for everyone to die before you could be forgiven? The generation of Hong Kongers who lived in the 1800s had already passed away, so no one remembered that Bonham was actually Hong Kong's third governor, Sir Samuel George Bonham, except for her, who loved to show off her knowledge and be a buzzkill at your classmates' gatherings—but murder was illegal, whether it was one person or an entire generation. And no matter how much you scratched those two trees with a key, they still stood there silently, refusing to let you be forgotten.

Didn't the two of you pledge your undying love beneath that tree? Didn't the two of you endure all those hardships together? Your mom dragged you to go to a familiar temple in Thailand where you were forced to meditate for three months, hoping you could find spiritual healing and peace. But even in front of foreign deities, with no access to cell phones or computers, adhering to a strict schedule and engaging in daily mediation, you

still couldn't dispel all the sorrow and resentment from your heart. You kept thinking about those two damn trees on Bonham Road, wishing that a signal number ten typhoon would strike Hong Kong and blow them down. Being toppled by a typhoon was an act of God that couldn't be legally pursued, right? Your mom, who joined you on your meditation retreat, didn't know that every day during those three months, you prayed for Hong Kong to be hit by strong winds. You also didn't know whether the deity in which your mom devoutly believed would grant such a significant wish for you, who wasn't yet a believer. However, upon your return to Hong Kong, you saw in the news that those two trees had in fact been cut down by the government.

You hurried to PHD Pizza on Bonham Road, gazing at the wall surrounding the University of Hong Kong's Tang Chi Ngong Building across the street. Two eighty-year-old trees had been cleared away so cleanly, not a single root remaining. You cried. Your wish had actually come true. A reporter on the scene asked you if you were sobbing because you couldn't bear parting with the trees. You didn't answer, so the reporter assumed her guess was correct and penned an online news article that mentioned a "resident sobbing in the street, unable to bear parting with the trees." The obstructing trees, even their roots, had been completely excavated. Workers filled the area where the trees once clung with fresh cement, bricks, and a railing, attempting to make the human-made structure appear as if it had never been disrupted by stone wall trees, and to prevent any possibility of new branches growing from the wall. Naturally, those newly added materials were noticeably off, lacking the weathered hue that the rest of the wall had acquired

from the elements and passing of time, resembling a fresh scar, an obviously lighter shade protecting a recently closed wound. The sidewalk on that side had become spacious once again. A pair of female university students casually strolled side by side through the spot that the tree trunks had once obstructed without needing to sidestep, and without glancing at the place once occupied by the trees. It was as though to them, it had always been an ordinary, treeless sidewalk, devoid of the memories of the two of you taking your wedding photos there.

This should've been the beginning of your exoneration from collective memory. There were too many incidents in the relationship you didn't dare recall, and too many truths you didn't want others to know. You really didn't want to admit that after being accused of plagiarism by your professor, you faked being pregnant, just to prevent him from breaking up with you. If you're a man, you'll take responsibility—we're already engaged; you absolutely can't leave me, you said. After he read your message during the cold war between the two of you, he called you at once, saying, We'll definitely get married. I'll take care of you. You never imagined that such a lie could mend your relationship, and to be honest, you never thought he'd fall for it. You asked him to keep your pregnancy a secret for three months, not even telling either set of your parents. This wasn't due to some superstition about the fetus becoming upset and dying if you told people too early, but to facilitate your lie a month later, when he accompanied his boss to a conference in the US, and you faked having a miscarriage and needing to go to a hospital in mainland China for a D&C procedure. Even if he would've wanted to fly the twenty-eight hours to rush

back immediately to take care of you, he couldn't, because your "cell phone network was unable to connect to Hong Kong from the mainland." You demanded that he never tell anyone about your miscarriage, saying you feared his parents might object to your marriage and stop it. You wouldn't abandon me because of this, right? Our wedding photos are already public. Everyone knows you're going to marry me, you said. He hugged you and agreed.

Did you really think he didn't know you were faking the pregnancy? she asked you in the lawyer's office. It was then that you realized he'd known all along. Was it her who told him? She was so smart that you wouldn't have been surprised if she'd learned to distinguish who'd suffered a miscarriage and who hadn't during her doctoral studies. After all, people who read so many books always seemed like supervillains in superhero movies, adept at using their various expertise to ruin the protagonist's life. It must've been her who told him about your fake miscarriage. Someone like her who wanted to intervene between you and him, wielding such powerful leverage—how could she not use it to drive a wedge between you two? Certainly, if he'd confronted you from the start, you would've had the chance to defend yourself or apologize. After enduring so many hardships and trials together, would one lie, blurted out in desperation to keep him, really make him resolutely determined to sever ties with you forever? Wasn't her intention in whispering behind your back to place you in an indefensible position and create a space for herself to fan the flames and capitalize on the situation? Just how many schemes did she cook up to snatch him away from you? I never thought you'd rat me out to him, you told her. You and I have known each

other for so many years, and you only got to know him because I introduced you two. How could you disregard our years of friendship for him? You asked, When did the two of you start betraying me? You asked, Did you sleep with him? You asked, What did you do to make him have a sudden change of heart? In the lawyer's office, your clenched fists trembled with rage, while tears of anger or sorrow streamed down your cheeks, spilling directly onto the deep red wooden conference table, glistening brightly.

Actually, his colleague took a short video of you getting drunk in a bar in Hong Kong and dancing intimately with another guy when you were pretending to have a miscarriage, she said calmly. The air in the room froze. He'd given you an opportunity to come clean, but you still chose to lie to him, and he just couldn't bear it anymore. You remembered him asking you: Did it hurt when you had the miscarriage? Did you bleed a lot? You said, Of course it was scary, of course it was painful. At the time, he looked so sad. It turned out he'd already known.

Yes, she said. Oh, by the way, I'm actually his younger sister's fiancée. He didn't wrong you, and neither did I.

Since then, you kept scratching up those two stone wall trees. She was completely innocent, and you had no room to defend yourself. You scratched and scratched those trees, trying to scratch off every stain from your body, but no matter how much you scratched, you couldn't remove those two trees from the world. Did she ever tell anyone outside that room the truth? Would the people who witnessed you inviting her to be your maid

of honor ever glean any clues from her? You'd flaunted your fairytale relationship so ostentatiously back then, and in the end, you could only pretend to amicably break up with him for reasons that couldn't be explained to others but were unrelated to you. Would people truly believe it? You wished everyone could just forget about this chapter of your life. so that no one would focus on your accusation-riddled past. But how could you delete one by one all the wedding photos and PDA snapshots that had already been transmitted to everyone's memories? Find someone else to marry, using a new narrative and new images to cover up your story with him? Burn down memory-triggering Bonham Road? Kill every classmate and friend from your generation? Murder and arson were crimes, and you didn't believe you could easily find someone else to create new images of a relationship with you. Other than scratching up trees, you had nothing to do.

When the government cut down those two trees, you couldn't have been happier. Cutting down trees was illegal, unless one was doing it for the government. Such old trees could've lived for many, many more years, but the truth was, they really shouldn't have been allowed to live for that long. The government said that the two trees were at risk of falling over. Although you couldn't hurt them no matter how much you scratched, you no longer cared about the truth. Even the roots that penetrated deep into the walls and the ground had been dug up and eradicated, and there were no longer those two massive witnesses reminding every passerby of what had transpired between you and him.

Traces of where the trees once grew had been erased

by the cement, and with time in the sun and rain, even the newly applied materials would seamlessly blend with the old, becoming indistinguishable. Perhaps then, you could be reborn from all this humiliation. The two stone wall trees had been cut down, but the shadows from the hill behind still fell on Bonham Road, like a sort of ghost, replacing the aerial roots that once grew from the stone wall trees, enveloping the indented wall and fresh cement on it. The not-yet-dark-enough sky failed to hide the conspicuous cement, still holding the potential to remind those in the know of those two trees.

You'd wait. Wait until those who'd seen those two trees grew old, wait until they were engulfed in greater joys and scandals, wait until the world changed bit by bit, pushing your scandal into the depths of history where it no longer held any interest for anyone. You couldn't kill every person who remembered, but you could wait for them to forget. You continued walking along Bonham Road toward Central, passing the cha chaan teng that had changed hands several times, the former frozen yogurt shop that now sold red wine, the fashion boutique that always claimed it was going out of business but only really closed down over a decade later. You slowly began to believe in the possibility of forgetting; on the side of Bonham Road near St. Stephen's Girls' College, the roots of those four other banyan trees that had been cut down remained on the stone wall, the cut marks sprouting many epicormic shoots, dense like an explosion of hair, lushly green. The wind blew, the eye-like and lip-like leaves of the banyan tree rustling and rustling above your head once more. You looked up, but couldn't make out who said what.

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