

Newsletter

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The Night

by Helen 邱玉涵

Second after second
I lie in the bed.

Ti-ck- to-ck- ti-ck- to-ck
One five-one six-one seven-one eight
Dark-dark-dark-dark
The wind
Sounds in the air.

I can feel
My eyelashes
Sweep through my face.
I can hear
My heart
Beat inside my body.
Bu-mp--bu-mp--bu-mp
Slow and weak.

Close and
Open my eyes
Nothing
In my room.

Whoosh- swish, whoosh- swish
My window is shivering
Cold
The cold wind
Touches my skin.

No moon today
No star today
Only
Buzz and hum
From far distance
Stay in my ear.

Roaring
It's roaring.
A giant monster
Walks close me.

No warmth,
No touch,
Part after part
It erodes
My skin
My body
And my soul.

Falling,
I am falling into
A hole
A dark hole
A hollow dark hole.



No one else here
No one else
No one
No

Ti-ck- to-ck- ti-ck- to-ck
four five-four six-four seven-four eight
Dark-dark-dark-dark
The wind
Sounds in the air

Loneliness

by Ann 劉穎蓁

Tide! He is tide.
In subdued tone,
He holds his trident to issue the billow high.
Oh!
I am drowned in the surge of the tide.
Silent darkness,
Gloomy sadness.

Air! He is air.
Bearing a pale face,
He speaks scornfully to make men overawed.
Oh!
I am chocked in the thin air.
Transparent existence,
Indifferent glances.

Flame! He is flame.
Having a peevish temper,
His eyes flash fierce fire to blaze the infinite prairie.
Oh!
My heart is engulfed by fearful flame.
Scorching wrath,
Arduous breath.

Loneliness! It's you
Transforming into
Tide, air, flame
Hour, day, year.
Oh!
Like a frail and injured greybeard
I am too weak to get rid of it
Or fight it back.

He haunts
And creeps
Up the unsuspecting victims
Ever
And
After.

Bunny Jumps Jumps

by 侯柔璋



Bunny jumps jumps
across the bed
under the desk

Bunny smells smells
behind the curtain
beneath the couch

The girl smiles
to the lovely little angel

Bunny scratches scratches
at the books
against the shoes

Bunny gnaws gnaws
on the cupboard
over the wooden door

The girl frowns
warning the naughty little animal

Bunny pees pees
toward the fancy overcoat
by the handmade feather pillow

Bunny poos poos
atop the wool carpet
inside the oak closet

The girl shouts
chasing the running-away little devil



Bunny runs runs
in haste
hides hides
in shade

The girl sighs
patting the furry little child

Bunny jumps jumps
into the girl's loving hug

Christmas

by Vicky 陳雅琦

Many colorful lights are shining brightly.
Everyone is truly blessed smiling happily,
Redecorating the trees and singing cheerfully.
Red stockings fill with the beautiful dreams.
Yellow light of the candle lights up all hope and my cheek.

Christmas is coming here.
Happiness is knocking the door.
Roast turkey, potato salad, and tasty beer.
I make a wish on the snowing day.
Smiles will never fade away.
Tears will finally all go away.
Merry, merry Christmas.
All people are singing around the stove,
Sharing wish and happiness on this amazing eve.



The Eagle

by Alexey 柳宗成

O highest eagle! Glory be to thee!
Unchained, uncaged thy crystal soul has been
That freely shines beyond the coaly sea.

Yet men can not behold thy sunlit sheen;
In graves of clanging pence do they reside,
And flesh in labor rots in moldy spleen.

To wake the mind in torpor, blow a tide,
With patting wings of thine, o eagle; bleach
The rusty hearts to hear joys that men hide.

If men have hearts to sporty vigors reach,
The dumb nature will have her tunes resung,
And hum the ballads with nymphs on the beach.

For eons soar with us, eagle! Keep young,
Naive springtimes that to green life have sprung!



Secret in the Shoe

Cindy

I witnessed the procedure of a gecko's death in my brother's shoe. It was half an accident and half of my responsibility. The thing just turned out to be out of my control. I have been keeping this at the bottom of my memory for years. Now, I'm going to let it out.

It was a Saturday morning in my fourteenth when the whole incident was unveiled. I saw a dying gecko crawling on the ground in the front door of our house. I went closer to it and then crouched to observe it carefully. In order to test if the gecko was dead, I picked up a twig under a tree, slightly nudging its body. The gecko made a little movement but was still too weak to dodge from my nudge. Later, it made a big movement, inspiring me to do a wicked thing which was the key factor of the whole disaster – it crawled toward my brother's shoe and I did not try anything to stop it. Impishly, I stirred the gecko with a slight finger movement; then it flew into the air, and eventually, fell into my brother's shoe quietly. I stood up and threw away the twig, thinking of two possibilities: First, the gecko would crawl out itself, if it had a strong drive to live on. Second, it would get stuck in the shoe and then my brother would discover it when putting his foot in the shoe. "Interesting!" I thought. After taking the last glimpse at the gecko, I left.



In the following days, my passion toward the gecko quieted down little by little. Since that day, the gecko never came out. The first few days, I was excited about when I would hear my brother scream at his shoe with his panicking face, so I checked if the gecko was safely inside and kept having an eye on my brother's expression every morning he wore his shoes. Time passed; however, I had never heard what I had expected because he hadn't worn that pair of shoes for weeks. My plan didn't seem to work that smoothly. I took a look at the poor little thing in the shoe. It slept soundly but seemed to be "thinner" than it was a couple of days ago. "Maybe it just didn't want to come out," I again talked to myself. After several days of tranquility in the morning, I gradually forgot what I had done to either the gecko or the shoe. I did not pay attention to what happened to the gecko any more since I thought my plan had failed. My life went on without any marks to prove that once there was a gecko joining a few minutes of my life.

What's done by night appears by day; the day finally came. "Holly cow!" I heard my brother cry in fear combined with extreme disgust. I

couldn't understand what he's saying at the moment. I rushed to the front door and glimpsed at something brown or maybe black in my brother's shoe. Listening to my brother's babbling about what's going on, suddenly, I was dawned by what I had done. The gecko died—exactly in the shoe. I had never thought that it would die! It should have left there already. "How serious is it?" I whispered in my mind. To satisfy my own curiosity, I plucked up my courage to take a look at its corpse. My eyes followed a busy ant's footsteps until it met a long line formed by its companions; then I turned my attention to the line. Tracing the long line, I found the destination these ants were leading me to. I was stunned on the spot. There was a tiny skeleton surrounded by numerous ants with some rotten meat clinging on it and countless maggots wriggled back and forth on the remaining corpse. The gecko decomposed in the shoe, my brother's shoe. A stream of regret flowed through my heart in company with a bit unutterable joy. I smile every time I imagined the look of his face at the very moment he found the rotten gecko. I couldn't get any closer to the rotten thing. I was afraid to look at it which would remind me of my crime. My brother wondered how the gecko got into the shoe. I pretended to be innocent. Putting on an I-know-nothing face, I offered some guesses of the possible reasons, such as the gecko had been dying and it had wanted to cross over the shoe but fell off in its last breath. I asked my brother to describe how he discovered it and the look of the rotten thing in order to reduce his suspicion of me. Fortunately, I survived from the crisis.

The following story of that pair of shoes is easy to imagine. My brother wanted to just throw away the shoes at first. However, my grandma had her way dealing with them. She knocked the shoe on the open ground in front of our house to get the corpse out of the shoe and let the scorching sun burn it. The maggots were immediately killed dead; the ants fled in all directions. The skeleton was left alone. After exposed to the sun and rain for several days, nothing in the shoe left but the shoe itself. However, my brother didn't wear that pair of shoes any more since then.

Many years have passed, I have never confessed to my brother of what I had done. I did witness a gecko's death and those images won't scatter and disappear just like the gecko. No one ever knows the secret except me. Sometimes, I wondered how many people can act like me. How can I be so scheming? Whatever, everybody believes that it was just an accident. No one could imagine that there really was such a boring person to commit such a harmless yet repulsive crime. It's his clever and mischievous sister. It's my brother's pleasure to have a sister like me. I haven't prepared to tell him yet. Maybe I won't tell him forever because – it's a secret.



Fitus Pool

Ellen 蔡亞倫

"What if you should decide that you don't want me there in your life and that you don't want me there by your side?"

Mr. Pool just heard the lyrics from the bus driver's radio. He was always sleepy every morning. As soon as Mr. Pool took a seat, he fell asleep right away. Even the loud music would not wake him up. The bus driver was a musicaholic, and he forced his passengers to share his interest. Most of the time Mr. Pool would not pay attention to the music, but this morning the music struck him.

"Brian, what is this song?" asked Mr. Pool.

"Oh Fitus, you finally ask me such a question. How much I hope someone will notice my music. It's one of my favorite songs. Its name is 'What if.' Guess what? The vocal got on my bus yesterday. You should see how cool he is."

Brian liked to chat with his passengers, especially Mr. Pool. Although Mr. Pool often closed his eyes, Brian knew Mr. Pool sometimes pretended to be asleep to avoid conversations. Every time he saw Mr. Pool, even on holidays, Mr. Pool always wore a perfectly straight business suit and behaved properly. Besides, Mr. Pool always sat behind Brian. Even though the seat was occupied, he would stand and wait. But, Brian felt that despite his set behaviors Mr. Pool's mind was stirring, and that something would burst someday.

Out of his habit, Brian greeted the girl getting on the bus. "Good

morning, Veronica. You look great today."

"Thanks, Brian. Hope it'll be a great day, too." Veronica said. "You got more passengers today. There's only one empty seat." Veronica walked to the only vacancy next to Mr. Pool. She sat down and took out her MP3 player. From her bag a flyer slipped out with the MP3 player, dropping on the floor near Mr. Pool's feet. He stooped to pick it up for her. On the flyer he noticed that there was a concert tonight at Roseland, near his apartment. 'I haven't went to a concert for a long time. Those kids look like me when I was a teen, so happy and so passionate. How nice to be young!'

When he lifted up his head and turned to the girl, Mr. Pool was stunned by her beauty. He hadn't looked at her while she sat down. Besides, he found an astonishing thing. Mr. Pool stared at her, wondering with mouth wide open. 'How come she looks like Natalie? Natalie doesn't have twin sisters. Who is she?'

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Veronica felt strange about this man. "Is there something on my face?"

Mr. Pool was still immersing in his thoughts and didn't answer. He looked funny when he was thinking so that Veronica couldn't help snickering. Her laugh drew Mr. Pool's attention back and made him embarrassed.

"Sorry for staring at you. Oh, your paper." He gave it to her, flustered.

The girl was in a pink chiffon dress with small floral prints and a hat with stylish badges. Her hair was long and smooth and jet-black. Sometimes, Mr. Pool smelled a fragrance, not too strong but light and refreshing. She seemed in a good mood. Humming softly, she tapped out the rhythm on her laps. When the bus turned at the corner, Veronica tilted close to him. Mr. Pool felt their distance closer and felt his heart beating faster.

"Do you want to go to my concert?" asked Veronica, but before Mr. Pool answered, Veronica cried out, "A park! It's a nice day to stroll in the park and lie down on the meadow, isn't it?" She acted like she took the route for the first time.

"Yes, it's a pity that we should work today." Mr. Pool said. 'That is just a park. Maybe she never goes to one.'

"It's you that should work, not me. Anyway, Veronica Grey." She stretched out her right hand.

"Fitus Pool." Mr. Pool stretched his hand, too, but Veronica turned away and said, "Sorry, I don't shake hands with people."

She was totally different from Natalie. He must be bleary-eyed. Natalie wouldn't say rude words and wouldn't be childish. She was humming louder and louder. However, he didn't hate her. 'She's a natural singer.'

Then the bus passed by a theater, a mall, a post office, several bookstores and shops. Those marble buildings had stood where they were for eighty years. On and off government would repair them because they were historical buildings with the Baroque style. Veronica seemed to like the buildings very much. She pointed here and there, looked with amazement and burst out "Gee" or "Wow" while Mr. Pool showed no interest on his routine bus route. After the bus crossed the bridge, they entered the new district of the city.

"Fitus, have you visited that new restaurant? You should try it. Their lobster is heavenly delicious." Brian said when the bus passed a restaurant. It was between an Italian restaurant and an Indian restaurant. Food on 45 Street was delicious, and the price was favorable. Mr. Pool sometimes had lunch with his clients here.

"I'll try it next week." Mr. Pool said and then was silent.

Usually the only sound on the bus was Brian's music. Other passengers either slept or read their books. None of them made a noise. Sometimes there might be murmurs. But Veronica broke the silence this morning. She sang, she laughed and she talked loudly. Veronica took off her earphones, and she was singing with Brian's music. 'Maybe I should frown at her. But I can't bear to do that at Natalie's face.'

"Can I ask you a question?" Her voice suddenly popped out.

"Sure." Mr. Pool was excited and wondered the question she might ask. 'Why, is she curious about me? She's weird, but somehow attractive. Oh, God. What's wrong with me? I'm interested in another woman.'

She found him wearing a ring on his ring finger. "Hey, you're married. But you keep your eye on me all the time. That's not good, Mr.

Pool.”

“Please don’t misunderstand. You look like my wife. I just want to figure out the coincidence.”

“Maybe that’s your sub-consciousness, illusion, or something else.”

As the bus was about to cross 52 Street, Brian slammed on the brake. Some female passengers screamed, which woke up sleeping passengers with shock. Brian pulled up the bus and apologized, “Sorry, a dog dashed out. It is safe. Anybody hurt?” “We’re OK,” one of the passengers answered. The bus was on the road again.

Mr. Pool also woke up. He forgot when he fell asleep, and he found that the seat next to him was empty. He was puzzled because he didn’t remember when Veronica left.

“Brian, did you see Ms. Grey?”

“No, who is she? Your secret lover? Tell me and I promise not to tell it to your wife.”

“Well, forget it. Maybe nothing happened. Maybe it was a dream.”

Mr. Pool felt upset. The dream was so real. He thought the girl might make the commute to work a little bit different. It might be his underlying desire to have changes. However, the time of change was not now, not today.

Then Mr. Pool got off the bus and headed for his office. Water spouted from the fountain in the square as usual. People walked quickly and passed him as usual. There were men and women lining up to get on Brian’s bus every day. The traffic was heavy every day. The lofty skyscrapers blocked half of the sky, Mr. Pool’s sky. Taking a deep breath, Mr. Pool walked to one of the business buildings and returned to his normal life.



From Complaining to Cherishing What I Have Had

49874413 魏奕寧

I always complained about things I was not satisfied with. My world never seemed perfect enough. Whatever was given to me or happened to me seemed just natural and I took everything for granted. I had never thought that they were true gifts until I took the Pre-practicum trip in my freshman year.

We went to a sanatorium for those who had drug addiction. We visited Maria Welfare Foundation teaching mentally-disabled kids and trying to empower them. And then, we visited a place called Pu Li Senior Village (長青村), a place for the victims of the 921 earthquake, especially for the old people.



I still remember when we arrived at the village and got off the bus, we were murmuring about how tired we were and I was leaning on my friend’s shoulder because of the sleepiness. I looked up and found that it was not a ceiling that cooled me off but the flourishing green vine growing and gathering above me. Then I looked around to find that the whole place was surrounded by prefabs. These prefabs were all decorated with delicate paintings, works of calligraphy, and spring couplets. Then my eyes were caught by the sign of a coffee shop. The price was very low and on the door read a line “chat with me.” Several seniors sat on the rattan chairs resting and nodding. It seemed to be a peaceful and serene place. Though I was so tired, I could not help but notice that the prefabs were very tiny, compared with the home I lived with my family.

Later, we were led to the so-called “meeting room.” We sat on the tables which were used for dining tables. My friends and I were confused and discussed about the pictures hanging on the wall because they were so old that their sides became yellow. We were also quite puzzled about the decoration because it was so different from any welfare foundations we had been to.

While all the students were waiting impatiently, one man suddenly came with a great smile and greeted us. He talked so fast and energetically that I felt a bit annoyed. I echoed along with him every sentence he said in my mind to kill time. Then I tried to chat with my friends, but I noticed that my friends started paying attention to the speaker. So, I began to listen. I thought the speech might end very soon.

Soon, I found myself attracted by the speaker’s story. I sat there listening to the speaker depicting how the village had been established and maintained and how these seniors trained themselves for their independent living and how they fought for their rights to be able to stay there longer. At the same time, I was thinking about my attitude toward my parents and my worries and unhappiness. Compared with these people, I had a much better life but I didn’t seem to be as happy as they were.

“Shame on me!” I said to myself, the first time in my life.

Then we watched a video. I saw that those senior people worried about not having a house to live. They thought about committing suicide because all of their children were dead and they didn’t even have a future. They sat there, telling their story with grief in their eyes. They said they never cried because they had already dried their tears. Their wrinkled faces told us of their hardships. However, they smiled. They smiled with us. I put myself in their position and I found that I would not have the courage to live on. And I might not have the ability to smile.

They smiled because they can sell the vegetables they grew for a living and they could cook for others; they smiled because they had chances to serve guests a cup of coffee, even though half of the cup spilled out because of their trembling hands. They smiled because they realized that they still had the ability to help companions. It seemed to me that even the smallest things would bring joy to their world.

My tears dropped down because I thought of my parents and what I had in my life. I really had nothing to complain about. I was so ashamed of myself for being always unsatisfied with what I had already had.

We all were in silence as the speech ended. We looked at each other, but I couldn’t tell what was in my friends’ minds and vice versa. We were just talking about what we were going to do at night, as usual. But I knew that we all felt complicated emotions with some guilt, some sorrows and some gratefulness in our hearts.

We had dinner there and the food was all prepared by those cute and happy senior people. We were impressed by those dishes. There were barbecue, all kinds of noodle and rice, vegetables and desserts. We shared food together. We ate everything and nothing left on the plate. I summoned up my courage to talk to those cute seniors and thanked them with my greatest sincerity. I never forgot how happy and contented we were. I remember that we all agreed that it was the best meal we had ever had.

Sadness loomed in our mind as the moment of departure inched closer and closer. We looked back at the village which stood there with faint lights.

In my mind, I promised myself that I would start cherishing everything I had. I knew it is the key to true happiness. Since then, whenever I wanted to grumble, I would think of those wrinkled faces with genuine smiles and I would immediately appreciate what I already had and stop complaining.

I have already had everything, and everything is perfect as it is.



Losing

Matilda

I couldn't forget the day I lost my father. He isn't dead but I no longer feel his existence. It was a humid and dismal summer afternoon before the typhoon landed on Taiwan. The air was smothering and the drizzling rain kept falling down on the iron sheet of the roof and the bell fruit tree before our house. A family of dotted stray cats sneaked into our house and hid themselves between the cart boxes we piled in the garden. They meowed and nudged against each other for spaces and sometimes even fought with their sharp claws. I was back from elementary school and saw some luggage placed at the front door in a line. The lights in the house were all turned on and the screen windows were opened wide. Mosquitoes buzzing around searched for the potential targets to prey on; a few landed on my bared arms and started to have meals. The air was dead. Several winged termites crawled on the floor leaving chips and tatters of their broken wings along the corridor in the house. Confused and frightened, I walked into the house

with my shoes on. In the living room, books were packed with plastic red ropes and all my father's favorite woodcarving statuettes were scattering on the ground. Father was packing up his luggage and belongings on the couch.

It was the first time I encountered a throw-in-the-towel

question. The moment he saw me, he sat down before me and asked, "Whom will you choose? Mommy or me?" I was afraid to answer at that time because I thought of my mom at first instead of him. My father was always strict and hard on me that I flinched from the consequences. He constantly punished me or scolded mom for no reasons but his bad temper. Sometimes, I would even want to escape to places where he couldn't find me and live with my mom happily after. I flustered a bit and felt butterflies flying in my stomach. It was too hard to tell the truth and it made me feel guilty to betray him. Time stilled and I just stared at him with my throat choked and tongue tied in knots. At last, he gave up and sighed, as if knowing my thoughts; he said, "Maybe you should stay with mommy." His face was blank and emotionless that I couldn't tell whether it was sadness or anger. He put away his belongings and looked at me for a minute or so, like he was thinking or regretting his decision of leaving us. Then he said, "Don't open the door for strangers; wait until mommy comes back." And he picked up all his belongings, locked the door and left. He slammed the door so hard that the cats in the garden jumped out of the boxes and fled into the dark alley. Our dog, Dubie, barked ferociously and walked back and forth impatiently. Like it sensed my grief, it quieted and moaned with a cracking voice. For the next following hours, I held it tight against me and waited for mom to come back.

I wasn't surprise of his leaving since he was having an affair at that time. And most of the time, he was complaining about my mom and me. My father thought that I wasn't a smart girl and scolded my mom for not teaching me well. The truth was, my mom did her best to teach me and work to support the family at the same time. No one should dare to judge her commitment to the family. Besides, I think it's wrong of him to look down on me, his very own daughter. In my opinion, parents should accept their children's defects and guide them. What he said and he did were simply paradox and excuses for not taking the responsibility as a parent. In a nutshell, he wasn't a qualified father.

After my father left, the house became empty. Things seemed to be corrupting and breaking at the same time. The typhoon landed at night and brought a great amount of rain to Taiwan. Mom didn't even say a word when she came back. She simply packed up some of our clothes and took Dubie and me to grandmother's house. And I never go back to our house again. I stayed at grandmma's until mom found a new apartment and moved out the house. Dubie was sent to an animal shelter since the new apartment didn't allow pets. Things I used to have were disappearing one by one. For a moment I thought I would burst into

tears for losing Dubie and the family house, but I didn't. Instead, I felt the responsibility to become stronger and independent. Though a pupil at that time, I determined to take care of my mom and myself.

My childhood ended at age 11. Afterwards, my world was upside down. Since my mom was constantly on the brink of breakdown at that time, I was so afraid that I might lose her. Every hour or so, I would wake up to check if she was alive. Watched her chest heave with uneven pace, eyelids tremble for the fiendish nightmare that haunted her night after night. Sometimes her breath was so faint that my heart almost stopped for the thought of her death. But all of a sudden, she might mumble decipherable words and wave her arms frantically in the air to break away from the demon that drowned her with the hatred for my father. "Go to death, you filthy thing!" She would yell while clenching her fists. I wanted to wake and save her but soon she would resume her sleep with her face as cold and emotionless as marble. It was a nightmare for both of us.

To start a new life, my mom and I moved to Da-an district where people all seemed to run a successful life. The students in the class of the junior high school I went to were all seemed rich and gifted. It was not a private junior high school but nearly every student had prestigious parents. Some of them were prominent lawyers, famous investors, talented TV producers, distinguished doctors and even a member of the parliament. By contrast, I was in a single parent family and had never been rich. In order to fit into the circles, I pretended to be wealthy by talking about the latest trend including fancy restaurants, expensive cell phones, traveling abroad; and I learned all these by eavesdropping my classmates and reading a lot of magazines and travel books in the book store. I didn't intend to fawn on them, but just tried hard to be accepted and hide my secret. I was so afraid to be treated as an outsider. Meanwhile, I felt fortunate that everyone had to wear uniform in the junior high school that no one would find out my identity. In the end, some even believed that I was far wealthier than they were. However, I was dreary and depressed. I felt like a chameleon disguising myself and no one understood me.

I was lost and often pitied myself for not being as lucky as they were. It was not until I decided to write the tragedy into an article in high school after my Chinese teacher encouraged me that I gradually found my path to the future. For me, writing is like catharsis, purifying my resentment and casting light to the darkest corner of me. Through writing, I untied the tangled feelings and comforted the frightened little girl in my heart. I realized then that maybe it was the opportunity for me to see things in different ways. And I might even forgive my father for his irresponsibility. Actually my mom and I both agreed that after he's gone, life's become easier. Especially my mom, she no longer suffered from the ugly truth of his affair while living with him under the same roof. I wrote and I healed. By flashing back details of my miserable childhood, I overcame my fear and became brave. I knew the reason for my anxiety and insecurity. The most important of all, I knew how to settle my heart. As I grew up, I saw people who were trapped in a more destitute and miserable status than I was. Compared to them, my loss is no disaster. What I should do is to cherish every moment and stop pitying myself. Do my best to help others and my mom.

I wanted to protect my mom from the harm and the aftershock my father left. To decrease my mother's burden, I washed clothes, took out the garbage and sometimes cooked dinner for both of us before she came home from work. Knowing that she was under extreme pressure of my father's leave, I seldom bothered her with my problems and tried hard to perform well on every subject in school. At the same time, I wanted to prove to my father that I was capable to do a lot of things without his guide and company and that I was not as stupid as he thought. Moreover, I started to learn to perceive my mother's feelings and be considerate. I listen to her first rather than speak ahead of her. It was tough for me at first since she constantly lost temper for my wrongdoings or simply outburst under the pressure. Times were hard for both of us. I lost my right as a child to be indulgent and childish because of my father's leaving. However, I never felt a sense of hatred or resentment to him. I learned how to forgive and seize the moment. The art of losing is hard to master, but after this torment, I survived at last. A tragedy as it was, it gave me the chance to be more independent and mature.

A Nude Portrait

Alexey 柳宗成

The door of the warehouse is neither locked nor latched. A father wounded, lying on the threshold is gasping with might and main. "Where...where... are you going, Somno? Help...hel..." Yet there's no one hearing the father's crying, and Somno, the son of the father, is actually gone; all one can see is the interior of the empty warehouse which is as dim as an abyss.

Not long ago, the warehouse was not that empty; conversely, it was Somno who was imprisoned therein. One could easily behold that Somno sat at the ground watching a palette of hues that invaded the skin of the portrait figure and that he had his head wearily lean against the wall.

Is that really you, Somno? Is that really you, Somno? Waves of a man's voice slapped on his ear and mind. Somno was appallingly frightened as if he had heard his inquisitor-like father chasing after him for scourging the sin of his and for saving him from the religious violation, by torturing with a breast ripper. *No need to be afraid; it's not Father; just look at me in the canvas.* The man's voice emerged again to calm Somno down, but Somno was still drowned in angst.

"Are...are...are ...are you speaking to me? Sir?" stuttered Somno to the man in the portrait, but the man made no response.

"It's me," replied Somno to the man, but the warehouse was still in deadly stillness.

Somno wondered where the voice came from; he leaned his ear closely to the man's chest to see if the man's alive. Pump, pump, pump, pump. Somno heard the melody of the heartbeating, but still had no clue where the sound actually came from; however, all he could be aware of was that the man's skin was as frosty as a shrouded corpse and as pale as a coffin sheet.

"Sir, you look so pale; you must be cold" whispered Somno, taking a glance to the oil colors behind the easel. "Don't worry, I will dress you well."

Shortly afterwards, Somno took the pen with his right hand and used his fingers to caress the figure with fingers of his left hand. He felt the man's neck like a marble column without any temperature. He felt the clavicle as an up-and-down mountain range. He then continuously moved his fingers to the man's chest and an image at this point brutally struck his mind. He was in an art lesson and was sitting at the schoolchair painting a man with plump breasts in a courtly velvet gown; abruptly there bursted a surge of cackles from other boys as if fiends were roaring and spanking his chubby cheek with their bony palms. They sneered, they taunted, and they made sissy postures to insult Somno and his painting. Then the schoolmaster came forward to quiet the boys down. Before the schoolmaster came hither, the boys all went back to their seats yet the schoolmaster stood beside his desk and the face flushed like a scarlet balloon. "Ridiculous! Is this what you call an artwork, Somno? A man in a gown with his sagging breasts? That's indecent and heretic!" Soon, the ferule in the schoolmaster's hand fell on Somno's palms; Somno's mind was blanket by the intersectional sounds of pat, smack, whack, and spank; again, pat! Smack! Whack! Spank! Patwhackspanksmackpatpatwhacksmack....

"Ouch!" cried Somno, feeling hands inflamed. But he refocused his distracted attention on the painting; his forehead was dampened with his sweatdrops. He took a few gasps and then kept on caressing the chest but then stopped his hand. He thought it's imperfect that the man's breasts had been mutilated. The mutilation made the man in improper proportion. Thinking of the mutilation, a fright hit Somno; he then quickly painted down a lace brassieres to cover the ugliness, then a layer of organdie undergarment to obscure the lines of the body, and finally a sack-back gown to make the body's imperfection unseen.



Somno then put his pen on the portrait man's groin. What would be the best apparel for the man? *Renaissance pantaloons?* A man's voice whispered to Somno's ears again.

"No," responded Somno then, "Absolutely no!" Somno recollected that one of his girl classmates in high school was being punished for talking back against the history teacher that the codpiece on the Renaissance pantaloons was a symbol of male's heathenism and she made fun of it in her project. She was soon taken outside of the classroom. Then, the sounds of pat, smack, whack, and spank penetrated the classroom's silence. Then, pat, smack, whack, spank, then pat, smack, whack, spank, finally patwhackspanksmackpatpatwhacksmack....

Having the memory re-emerged in his mind, Somno began to talk to the portrait and started to paint.

"I think that girl's right. Renaissance pantaloons and a codpiece are impressive only in appearance and it's a symbol of heresy. Those who wear these are just bragging about their power. They want to control the world with their power as God plays the puppetry of the world with violence. But in fact, they are just stupid pantaloons. So, I will not dress you in pantaloons but in the gown. It gives you a proper proportion. It looks attractive in full length."

Simultaneously and unexpectedly, the pat, smack, whack, and spank reappeared beyond the warehouse door. Pat, smack, whack, and spank with a man's tapping steps.

"It's Father, it's Father, I'll be scourged ...," yelled Somno in hysterical madness, having difficulties to control his utterance, trying to find something to cover the canvas. "I must hide, you must hide, he...she...it must hide. But where can this neither-he-nor-she hide? No, hide in here! No, there...Father will see you... No, here! No, there!" The lock of the door clicked. The door opened with a creak. The light intruded the darkness— FATHER SHOWED UP! FATHER! FATHER!

"Somno, it's lecture time," announced his father with solemnity, while Somno curled himself at the corner, hid his head in his circled arms and bent knees, and shivered as if he had been spiritually possessed by evils. "Look as if you really needed God's help, my poor lamb."

Switching his sight, his father was subsequently aware of the canvas— a man in a woman's silver gown. What a monster! How evil the witchcraft is! It's in violation of Nature. It's in blasphemy against God. It's worship to the diabolic thinking. The father's heart swelled with wrath in a wink. His eyes drowned with surging blood. His breath dashed in and out. Eventually, his scorching tongue and his sullen lips let out his pressed words.

"What on earth is that monster?" the father ground his teeth, hitting the scourge on the door. "There you go again? Damned sissy dressing! Damned insanity...."

Somno's father continued his reproach to Somno himself. Yet Somno was still weeping, his body all shivering.

"Cry for what, girlish boy! You spineless brat! You incapable sissy! Wipe away tears and stand up! I'll burn the canvas and then take you to the chapel to have the other priests take care of you! Go change your disgraceful sissy dress! We'll depart for the chapel soon! You really disgust me!" The father roared to Somno, seized the canvas, and then ripped off Somno's blouse, skirt and brassieres, leaving Somno shirtless.

Take that dagger, take that dagger, stab it into his heart and rescue me from his hands! That voice of the canvas man hissingly emerged all over again.

Yea! Kill him, kill him, I have been in ordeals for a long while, man abuses us too much for their bias, I disbelieve in his God's words that men must not dress like a woman. I hate them for raping the pretty queens and princesses with offensive words. Did men create the world? Are men's rules fair to us that are not "real men"? Why have they so wronged us? Questions popped up in Somno's brain and teardrops fell like rolling stones, and finally landslide.

The father set fire that sounded like patwhackspanksmackpatpatwhacksmack. The sounds crisscrossed his brain, and then the yell of the schoolgirl reappeared. *Kill him, kill him, be yourself, kill him, kill him, be yourself....* The sound persisted in loudening, then a man's sound incorporated, and eventually the sound of patpatwhack came in. *Kill patwhack him pat kill whack him, stab in his heart, pat kill whack him kill him, stab in his heart....* With the sound

continuing and messing with one another, a surge of energy was churning in Somno's heart. *Kill him kill him kill him*. Somno himself felt that his heart was going to blast and he breathed violently as the darting bull inhaled and exhaled before the bullfighter. *Kill him—kill him—*His father then held the canvas and was about to throw it into the fire.

"KILL HIM—MY CANVAS!" Somno took the dagger, rushed it to his father, and pierced it into father's body; then the blood exploded from the heart, the drop sprayed the air, and blood then converged into a scarlet swamp with his father falling and lying on it. The canvas fell on another side. Somno seized it nervously and rushed out of the warehouse.

"My man! We are saved, saved from the fiendish fathers! We no longer have to endure the fathers! It's our time of glory and of liberty! Let's get out of this tyranny!" Somno repeatedly howled with laughter to the portrait, embracing the portrait and leaping up and down. Hurriedly he left the house without turning his head back to see the father lying on the ground. His figure went further, further, further, and at last disappeared as a dot in the horizon. The yelling for joy was soon smoothed

"Where...where are you going, Somno? Help...hel..." groans Somno's father and then he makes his dying inhale. However, no one responds. Blood still wells from Father's pricked chest like a gushing fountain but now the breath of his seems to be frozen. There then comes no more sound but the smack of the creaking door against the doorframe. The warehouse is opened not closed, and the sun and the moon are now both hung on the sky. The interior of the warehouse gets darker and darker as one has his perdition, walks down the inferno, and sees nothing but all in pending and gulping dimness. Father rests in that dimness indeed. He makes no more moves. But let Dimness swallow his body at her will.



It's All about Love

Joshua

This is not a love story, but a story of learning how to love.

The first time I saw her was at the English camp held by seven different high schools' English conversation clubs. The activity was conducted by the English conversation club of my high school in the summer vacation of our freshman year. Being a coordinator of the conversation program involving foreign teachers, I got to observe some outstanding participants in the activity. As young high school students, few were willing to talk because of shyness, even though they were interested in English. But she was an exception. She always took the initiative to break the uncomfortable silence and I was really impressed. On the second day of the conversation camp, I joined the course instead of watching club members aside. I sneaked into the ongoing class, and fortunately found an empty seat beside her. "Hi, may I take the seat?" I then introduced myself with an awkward grin and read her face carefully. She had a cute chubby face with indescribable attractiveness to me. "Sure!" she responded with her smile glittering. "I know you, the guy who wore skirt dancing in the party yesterday," she said. I laughed and she told me her name was Allen, which was inscribed in my mind then.

She definitely left great impression to me. However, I wasn't sure if I really fell for her or not in such a short time because I didn't believe in falling in love at the first sight at all. But I was curious about her. After the camp, finding every possible chance as I could, I often chatted with her by phone or even asked her for studying together in the library. Therefore, I gradually knew her better: she loved movies and music, and her favorite movie was *Romeo and Juliette*. She loved walking around the park after meal. Jogging with her father in the late evening was her favorite sport and that's how she could keep in a good shape. She was so sincere to her friends that she tried her best to maintain her friendship with her friends and could always smooth things out with others because of her innocence, honesty and kindness. The more I learned about her personality, the more I appreciated her.

The bud of love started growing. I was intoxicated in the time we spent together and thought perhaps she's the right one. But I didn't desire the intimate relationship to begin too soon; I had to know more about her and didn't want to ruin the moments that were just about the right amount of sweetness. However, still, I decided to express that I

really liked her. I plucked the all courage up and felt quivering, like a warrior facing the battle ahead. I wrote an article about my feeling toward her in my blog and told her to visit it. After few days, she gave me a call, and I wondered what would become of us after the conversation later.....

I unconsciously and continuously chuckled like a fool after the phone call. It was pretty clear in our phone conversation that we wouldn't start a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship this moment, for we knew that we still needed some more time to know each other and were also afraid of being distracted from schoolwork. But she expressed the same positive feeling as I did. Since then, we began to share our thoughts and ideas toward trivial stuffs in daily life with each other, which meant the trust was built. I tried to be her best audience and gave suggestion and stood in her shoes to feel what she felt, and vice versa. The chemical reaction toward each other was accelerating; I wanted to be the one she could always rely on.

Time went by and the testament came. The entrance exam was coming. As the exam was our priority, I gradually reduced the frequency chatting with her, and the distance between us enlarged. On the Christmas Eve of the junior year, I hastily gave her a card of my sincere wishes because she had to catch the bus and answered the phone call simultaneously. I saw her dragging her shadow and getting on the bus. Realizing that we were no longer as close as we had been, I called her, honestly telling her that everything seemed different and I felt lost. Dead silence came right through the telephone line after my confession. Then she broke the harsh emptiness, "I don't know why you turn into aloof in all of a sudden," she paused a little bit, "so I am not sure if you still feel the same for me..."

The distance invariably blurred the feeling, and uncertainty emerged. Having so much regret for the snobbish consideration: intentionally decreasing our contact to prepare for the exam, I sought for a solution. To maintain our friendship, we kept in touch as what we had done before: studying together sometimes and making phone calls to show our care and concern for each others. During the time with great pressure, we gave support to each other spiritually and I even felt that the relationship was reinforced again. Everything seemed to be very promising: After the test, we would enter the ideal university and finally start a stable relationship.....

Obviously, this was a dream too good to be true. Coincidentally, the reality was completely opposite to my own expectation. On one hand, I performed awfully terribly in the exam. On the other hand, she still had to work hard for her freshman year to change her major after enrolling into NTU so that she wasn't really ready for developing the relationship. Finally, we decided not to change the status quo now, so we both could settle down with our different life paths for a while.

Our lives, like two parallel lines, seemed to gradually expand far beyond the horizon and hardly crossed. For half a year, the first semester of the freshman year, we seldom contacted each other. I darted to leave all the past expectations behind so that I would feel better, though sometimes, I sent text messages to her when it became cold or exams came. Paradoxically, I tried to forego the past but simultaneously to inform her that I still cared about her. It was because to forsake what I had once mostly cherished was too hard for me.

Concurrently being immersed in the struggle for how I should face her and dealing with the failure of entrance exam, I felt extremely anxious about the recurrence of the beautiful past. In the second semester, she asked me whether I could revise and give some comments about her English composition. During discussion, we talked to each other like old friends. The incomparable happiness existing in the past beautiful moments that we spent together seemed to emerge at that time, whenever it came to the discussion of the composition or sharing details of our lives.

However, due to the exhaustion of the expectation, I cautiously faced the intersection: to be or not to be brave to believe there was still possibility between us. The dilemma nearly freaked me out. Once in March, in the usual online discussion about her composition, she was late to discuss with me and my patience ran out. The patience here didn't only mean the time I waited for the discussion but also the expectation that I was tired of. After we talked about the composition, I revealed all that had stocked in my mind: frustration, expectation, fatigue..... She then said: "After those trivial and annoying events I

underwent in the university, everything becomes clear. You are the unique person for me among all the people around me. I'm sorry letting you wait for several years, and I'm sure how important you are to me. However, I have to concentrate on my school work, could we begin when everything settles down in this summer vacation?" My mind went blank for few seconds, for things twisted unpredictably and dramatically. But I surely remember about what I said: Yes, I would wait. Those months of waiting and suffering were worthy of the sudden moment when I heard her acceptance. Not until the summer days came did I feel that I was renewed and became a new person because we were going to settle down.

Finally, the summer days came. It was the first date since the summer vacation began. We walked through the campus of NTU hand in hand and talked freely. Such image probably would only have been played in my dreams or reveries, I thought, but it was true here and now. Certainly, I felt excited, but I still sought for her verbal confirmation of the potential stable relationship previously but vaguely promised. A guy then rode a bike toward us and she whispered that she knew the guy. I thought it was an implication so I loosed her hand. "Hey, don't let go of my hand ever like this." She smiled and said it like joking, but I knew she was serious. And I knew our new journey as a boyfriend-girlfriend thing finally and "officially" commenced at the moment.

