

# BOOKS FROM TAIWAN





## BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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# EDITOR'S PREFACE

In this issue of *Books from Taiwan*, we bring you the art of the story – not the art of the novel, but the story. Intuitively, we know that the story and the novel are not the same. Sometimes, their major difference is only one of degree; the latter is usually much longer, after all. Yet deeper disparities remain. So often, the novel is a fictional tale that fills up its borders and pretends to be a world all its own, governed by its own physics, landscape, and potentiality. It can make vast claims about what is.

The story, by contrast, is thing that is told, with a conscious emphasis on the art and space of its telling. A short story can be a bare room in which something is built, sometimes broken, then taken down and removed. The storyteller's figure is inseparable from the story itself; I think back to my *xiangsheng* (相聲) master's voice, gestures, and expressions, which gave the experience of telling and listening their immersive yet self-conscious qualities. The storyteller recounts, while the novelist often lies.

This issue features a rich helping of tales and lies of all kinds. Wang Shu-Fen's *The Thief* re-enacts *Rashomon* in a fifth-grade classroom. *Nine Days and Nine Nights* offers us stories of the individual heart under the hand of martial law, *The Fog Catcher* follows growing minds in later decades of modernity, while *Still Life* brings many monologues in a chorus of the alone. Illusion is a crucial theme in this issue, as in *For Real*, whose author protagonist finds herself lost in the world of online dating scams, even while her own fictional characters begin to come to life. *Call Me Up in Dreamland* features conflicting stories, battles of perception, while *The Great Candidius Hotel* brings the ultimate understated spectacle that we long for in a mystery: a story whose main character lies dead. Who says dead men tell no tales?

Human beings are storytelling animals. We search for truth, yet delight in fantasy. This issue offers us Taiwanese stories told with brush, pastel, and ink, whose beauty lies as much in method as in matter.

Yours on paper,



**Canaan Morse**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

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# MINISTRY OF CULTURE, REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN)

## TRANSLATION GRANT PROGRAM

*Books from Taiwan* supports the translation of Taiwanese literature into foreign languages with the Translation Grant Program, administered by The Ministry of Culture of Taiwan. The grant is to encourage the publication of translations of Taiwan's literature, including fiction, non-fiction, picture books and comics, and help Taiwan's publishing industry to explore non-Chinese international markets.

- Applicant Eligibility: Foreign publishers (legal persons) legally registered in accordance with the laws and regulations of their respective countries, or foreign natural persons engaged in translation.
- Conditions:
  1. Works translated shall be original works (including fiction, non-fiction, picture books and comics) by Taiwanese writers (R.O.C. nationality) in traditional Chinese characters.
  2. Priority is given to works to be translated and published for the first time in a non-Chinese language market.
  3. Applicants are not limited to submitting only one project for funding in each application year; however, the same applicant can only receive funding for up to three projects in any given round of applications.
  4. Projects receiving funding shall have already obtained authorization for translation, and be published within two years starting from the year after application year (published before the end of October).
- Funding Items and Amount
  1. The subsidy includes a licensing fee for the rights holder of original work, and a translation fee and a production fee.
  2. The maximum funding available for any given project is NT\$500,000 (including income tax and remittance charges).
- Application Period: From September 1 to September 30 every year.
- Announcement of successful applications: Before December 15 every year.
- Application Method: Please apply via the online application system ([http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant\\_index.php](http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant_index.php)) after reading through the Translation Grant Application Guidelines (available online).

For full details of the Translation Grant Program, please visit

[http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant\\_index.php](http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant_index.php)

Or contact: [books@moc.gov.tw](mailto:books@moc.gov.tw)





# BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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# STEALING TIME

## 1981 光陰賊

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©Chen Chien-Chung

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YANG ZHAO  
楊照

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- Category: Literary Fiction
  - Publisher: Ink
  - Date: 9/2016
  - Rights contact:  
Grace Chang  
(Books from Taiwan)  
booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
  - Pages: 240
  - Length: 70,000 characters  
(approx. 46,000 words in English)
- 

Originally trained as a historian, Harvard-educated author Yang Zhao ended up at the editorial helm of news publications like Taiwan's *Tomorrow Times* and *The Journalist*. Now a popular host on classical music radio, he has lectured and appeared as a commentator on stages all over the island, all the while penning stories, essays, criticism, and guides to classical texts.



\* 2017 Chiu Ko Fiction Prize

The doors of life seem to be closing for the protagonist of this story and for his lover. He is a high school senior on the verge of taking his college entrance exams and constantly feeling pressure from his parents to study abroad. She is a literary editor, a lover of poetry and fiction who acceded to her sick mother's demands that she lead a "happy" life by marrying a doctor and moving to America. Both wish desperately to escape realities they had no hand in choosing; both seem to see each other as their only way out. Meanwhile, the external pressures bent on driving them apart only strengthen their resistance, driving the situation to a point at which something has to break.

Author, historian, and public intellectual Yang Zhao employs a highly rhythmic, fluid prose in this narrative of secret passions and public repression, in which time and space themselves are a palpable medium, a conduit for emotion. Readers who open the book will assuredly fall headlong after the main characters, who are at best controlling their descent through the chasms of the heart.

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# STEALING TIME

By Yang Zhao

Translated by Michael Day

## Time

M spent all Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon at my house – with me, in my room, in my bed.

Time seemed to have bent, to no longer follow its smooth, regular course. Time branched into different paths, with different densities and rhythms. The thickest, stickiest times were times of desire, in which our bodies entangled, and with each low, frenzied call she seemed to drift further into trance, as if floating toward the mouth of a whirlpool; she held me tight to avoid being sucked in, to avoid this whirlpool from which there might be no escape, and I too embraced her with all my might. But this embrace stirred in me an even stronger impulse to explore her body, repeatedly and patiently probing her in every way I knew, pushing her ever deeper into trance, spurring her on into peril, toward that whirlpool that might swallow her forever, and she could only hold onto me tighter, tighter with vanishing hope.

We spun ourselves into a swirling whirlpool of time. I knew time had passed, and when I lifted my head I saw the room with its drawn curtains growing ever darker, but time had weight, swirling heavily around us, the seconds and moments densely packed, so that time seemed to form not into seconds, but into dense lumps.

I took off my watch and placed it on the nightstand, and glanced at it periodically as

we intertwined amid the shifting currents. Of course I was too busy to reach out and grab the watch to check the time, but I felt that if I did I would see that the hands no longer moved, that the second, minute, and hour hands were frozen in place – not stopped, but frozen, their movements restrained by some overwhelming, oppressive force that froze time, held it back for just an instant; and then in another instant the force slackened, and the second, minute, and hour hands abruptly turned many revolutions, jumping madly forward.

After a while, the tides of passion ebbed, and time's viscosity thinned. Time stretched out into long bands, but creases still marked its surface. After a while, a wave of drowsiness approached, and time grew flatter, turning gradually from a solid to a nearly two-dimensional plane, and we drifted on time like a translucent white sheet, nothing but a pure void beneath. Before this delicate sheet of time descended, I woke with a start, and turned to make sure she was still there beside me, my hand stroking her thick, curly hair, and passion rose again very rapidly, time again growing thick, beginning again to bend like a metal plate in a foundry furnace, like something neither solid nor liquid, flowing yet not flowing....

In ordinary time, she would speak to me. Or perhaps, when she could speak without gasping, without screaming and shouting, time was restored by her to its ordinary condition. When she spoke, she spoke nearly always of her family.

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She spoke of her father. When her father was at home, by force of habit they closely watched his every move. When he rose from his seat, someone would invariably follow. They'd light the lamp in the hallway before him, then turn back and extinguish the one in the study. When he entered the bathroom, they'd close the door behind him. With his first step across the threshold of the dining room, they'd ask if he wanted dinner. If he nodded, one person would go to the kitchen to prepare the meal, and someone else would call the children to the table. From early morning to late evening, a kettle of hot water and a pot of soup were always on the stove, and two plates of food were kept ready in the cabinet, so that whenever he felt a twinge of hunger, dinner could be on the table in no more than ten minutes. She recalled that her father rarely did anything on his own. In his study, when he wanted to take down a particularly heavy book, he'd simply clear his throat twice, and her mother or the maid knew to come ask what he needed. In the parlor stood a wooden shelf lined with record albums. Her father would stand before it, inspect it, pull out a record, and place it on the top edge of the wooden shelf, and whoever was in the parlor would know he wanted to play it. Once, her father picked up a record and set it down on the shelf, but when her mother came over, she put a different record on the turntable. Her father's eyes widened. As the record began to play, he furrowed his brow, staring at the tile floor at his feet; then, without saying anything, he got up and left. The next time, the moment her father took his seat, her mother took the very same record to the turntable. As the music began, her father straightened his back as if to rise, and gripped the armrests of the wicker chair with force; moments later, he gave up, and sank back down again. After several attempts, he finally rose to his feet, and for perhaps the only time ever, made his way to the turntable and lifted

the needle – at which point the music abruptly stopped, leaving only her mother's sobbing to fill the parlor.

She remembered crying with her mother. She didn't know what had happened, but the atmosphere in the room scared her into crying. When her father rose from his seat, she was certain he was about to throw a fit, let loose a rage-filled rebuke that would shake the heavens, and she sobbed in anticipation.

Her father was often angry at the children. When his rage boiled over, he would fold his arms across his chest and deliver a scolding in booming tones so loud she could never be sure what he was yelling about. She could make out only two words: "Beat him!" He yelled with such insistence that it slurred his diction, leaving the instruction only barely comprehensible. Her mother was the one meant to deliver the beating, and she would hold the ruler in one hand, grabbing the child with the other and smacking the ruler hard against his calves. Her carefully combed hair would fly free, whipping across her face in unkempt strands as she snarled, baring her gritted teeth. It was a terrifying sight. Even if she wasn't the one being beaten, seeing her mother like that set her quivering with fear.

Her father did not beat the children; in fact, he hardly ever touched them. She recalled only one time when her father had slapped her little brother. He'd yelled over and over, "Beat him! Beat him good! Beat him good!" Her mother had cooperated as best she could with the beating, until she'd used up all her strength, and her little brother slipped away. In the struggle, her mother tripped and fell, and as she lay motionless on the floor her brother went charging off in the other direction, only to nearly collide with her father, who slapped him across the face.

In this case, of course, she did recall the reason. Her brother had told someone that their father was a *benshi*, and he had become the butt of jokes among the neighbors. Her father was

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irate. Her father was a *bengoshi* – a lawyer, one of the first in Chiayi, whereas a *benshi* was a narrator of silent films in the Japanese colonial era. For her father, it was a disgrace to be referred to by his own son as a *benshi*.

Her father the lawyer insisted that his son had to be a doctor – no, he couldn't be anything else. For as long as she could remember, she'd heard her father tell her mother and her brother that there were people in the world who disrespected lawyers, and even made fun of them, because they might go their entire lives without needing a lawyer, or even crossing paths with one. But nobody dared disrespect a doctor, because everybody got sick, everybody needed one eventually.

Since it was impossible for his daughter to become a doctor, the best she could do was marry one. According to Japanese custom, a doctor's home always had a second-floor parlor with a piano, where friends gathered to listen to Beethoven. Studying music was the best way to ensure one became a doctor's wife. A doctor's wife was in charge of the nurses, the waiting room, and the medicine. Who dared disrespect her?

"But you didn't become a doctor's wife." I meant it in good fun, but regretted it as soon as the words left my lips. Having no desire to hear her reply, I ducked my head and kissed her almost violently, pulling her onto her side and rolling her on top of me, until her weight and her breath aroused in me a new wave of desire, and again time was curved, sticky, and dense.

## Walking Away

She no longer remembered to cast off her clothes in a neat pile. When she had to go to the bathroom, she first searched the floor for her underwear, but couldn't find her chemise. I handed her the sweater I'd hung on the back of the chair, and she hesitated for a moment before reaching out and grabbing it. I took back my

hand, and summoning my courage, said softly, "I'll help you put it on." She hesitated again, then turned her back to me expectantly.

As I pulled the sweater over her head, she pulled her hair through the neck hole, and I couldn't help myself from giving her a kiss on the back. To my surprise, as soon as my mouth touched her skin, I felt fine goose bumps rise between my lips. I moved my lips up and down, left and right, finding everywhere newly risen goose bumps. It was great fun.

As I dragged my lips playfully across her back, she smiled and writhed, at last finding the armholes and pulling on the sweater, and as she pulled back her arms, the sweater fell to cover her back. The momentum sent me rocking backward, but I recovered and embraced her. I rested my chin on her shoulder, and she kept completely still. We stayed that way for a long time, a minute, maybe two, and the silence and stillness pressed down on me, as if to squeeze something out from inside. Before I could open my mouth, she sensed it somehow, and said, in a hushed voice, "Don't say anything, please, just don't say anything." Imitating her hushed tone, I replied, "Okay, I won't say anything, I just won't say anything."

The atmosphere had grown overly serious, and I had to relieve it by moving my hands. I burrowed my hands beneath the sweater, my fingers creeping upward until they reached the lower edge of her breasts. I realized she was wearing nothing beneath the sweater, and that this was the first time I'd reached my hands inside her clothing to caress her, and I again became excited, feeling more attracted to her now than I had been a moment ago when she was completely nude.

She rose hastily to her feet, and fled from the room. A few seconds later, she appeared again on the threshold, the door halfway open, stuck only her head inside and said, smiling, "No joking around, now. Tell me where the bathroom is." I



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was sure hers was the most beautiful face I'd ever seen, that in that moment, I'd discovered for the first time what beauty was. How could she be so gorgeous?

She prepared to leave, feeling about in the darkness for her clothes. I swept open the window curtain. Lamplight from outdoors spilled through the frosted glass, and instantly threw her silhouette into relief, particularly the line that jutted subtly from her collarbone to her breasts, the slight protrusion of her nipples, and the gentle slope back down. In this dim light, she turned all about as she gathered her clothes, facing left, facing right, bending her arms, craning her neck, like a dancer moving to a silent rhythm, expressing through very simple movements the ambiguous instant of a lotus preparing to open its first blossom, and I observed intently, thinking, how could she be so gorgeous? It was a beauty I could never fully capture with words.

As always, she put her clothes on and left, casting not a glance in my direction. I stared at her walking away, immersed in an emotion I can't describe, wondering at how I'd just been in such close proximity to such a gorgeous person, a human being of such staggering beauty. Still entranced by her beauty, I forgot the pain of parting and simply watched as she walked away.

That was Saturday evening. On Sunday evening, when she walked off again without looking back or uttering a single word, I remembered that feeling of being torn apart, that feeling that some unnamable thing inside me that I'd gotten used to having had been forcefully taken. I felt some power pulling me toward her, and suddenly an image appeared in my mind: I saw myself sitting up in bed, and as suddenly as a spring recoiling I was in the living room, and I embraced her tightly from behind, and she cried out, "No, please, not now." I insisted: "Don't leave, I won't let you leave, I love you." She covered her ears, and continued

stubbornly toward the door, and I felt a great strength well up within me, like an ocean wave pulling every stone as it recedes, and I pulled her back, pulled her onto the porcelain floor of the kitchen, where she landed with a loud bang.

I had startled myself. I never knew I had the capacity for such violence. I lay in bed, in shock, eyes closed, too dazed to watch her figure recede into the distance.

## Sunday

I closed my eyes, and kept them closed for a long time, but I didn't hear the sound of the door opening and shutting. I opened my eyes slowly, dreading what I might see, and the first thing I saw was her face, no more than a meter from my eyes.

"What are you doing? Did you fall asleep?" she asked, wearing the same stunning smile.

How could she possibly be so gorgeous? How could she launch this surprise attack on me with such nonchalance? How could the sight of her walking away one minute ago have turned so quickly into a smile? And how could she ask me this?

I tried my hardest, I really, truly did, and thought the corners of my lips twitched upward a few times, the reply just wouldn't come out. It was the tears, the damn tears that came first, flowing in twin streams from my eyes and down to my lips, as my mouth said something I hadn't planned to say: "I can't stand to see you leave!" The words came between gasps of air, and even I couldn't hear clearly what I'd said, so it's no wonder she couldn't either. "Every time...you do this to me every time...you leave without looking back...you don't even look back...you don't even say goodbye...every time the same...I can't take it!"

Eyes fixed on my tears, still wearing that gorgeous smile, she wiped my cheeks, and said, "Hey, I did turn back. I looked back, and I asked, 'Would you like to go out for dinner?'"

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# STILL LIFE

## 生之靜物

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©Luke Huang

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### WANG TSUNG-WEI 王聰威

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  - Publisher: Ecus
  - Date: 11/2016
  - Rights contact:  
Grace Chang  
(Books from Taiwan)  
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@gmail.com
  - Pages: 272
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(approx. 55,000 words in  
English)
  - Rights sold:  
Japanese (Hakusuisha)
- 

Author and editor Wang Tsung-Wei has at one point had his hand on or near the tiller of the most successful periodicals in the country, serving as deputy editor-in-chief of *Ming Pao*, *Marie Claire*, and *FHM*. Since taking on the position of editor-in-chief of UNITAS Publishing, he has guided the magazine to 2016 Golden Tripod Awards for Magazine of the Year, and Best Arts & Humanities Magazine as well as 2017 Golden Tripod Award for Best Art Design. His name frequently populates short lists for book awards, and he is well known as a literary personality all over Taiwan.





An unexpected, violent confrontation between Mei-Chun and her husband leaves her body bruised and her life shattered. Mei-Chun's resolve holds firm; she takes her daughter, moves out, and serves her husband with a divorce settlement. She does not wish to part with him, but she will not simply submit, so she moves in with an emotionally generous friend from college and waits for her husband to step up and apologize. The wait is paralyzing for someone who has already endured severe emotional damage; unable to work or conduct her life normally, she relies on her friend more and more for support as she gradually cuts all ties to the real world.

*Still Life* is a work of monologue as broken dialogue. Every chapter features the utterance of a different character, often speaking in the confessional or accusatory second person as well as in the first. But do these soliloquies ever connect to their intended recipients, or are they spoken into the ever-present void between individual spirits?

Wang Tsung-Wei, a literary craftsman well-acquainted with stories of passion, obsession, and loneliness, offers us here his newest piece of emotional artisanship, in which many voices stand on their own, singing to each other, and to the darkness surrounding them.

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# STILL LIFE

By Wang Tsung-Wei

Translated by Zac Haluza

Our new home is several metro stops away from our old one, just a twenty-minute trip in total. Although it's already too late to explain, this alone should show that I didn't really want to leave home. But wouldn't saying this only make me look useless? It may just be putting on appearances, but I want you to know, Ren, that we still live close to one another. You can still talk to me about anything. I don't want you to grow distant. Are you home now? It's a little past seven, and I'm in this old apartment, boxed in by odds and ends that don't belong to me, thinking about every little thing. If you are home, what are you doing? Playing video games? What did it feel like to see the signed divorce form I left there?

Twelve o'clock came and went, and I started to tire. Was it because I felt bored? When I was working, I would always have to go from one place to another. I barely had time to be tired. Sleepiness only became a habit after I was pregnant with Chuan, and even after I had her, I couldn't go back to my old routine. Sleep would sneak up on me stealthily, so that I wouldn't feel there was anything to be afraid of. I'd think I could fight it off. But when it finally pounced, I would be powerless to resist. I would fall unconscious. It was awful, really. After I had Chuan, I couldn't get rid of my fatigue. No matter how much sleep I tried to make up afterwards, I couldn't shake off exhaustion, even if I spent the whole day lying down. People say that children bring their own wealth with

them, so you don't need to worry about being unable to provide for them. Yet I felt like all she brought was fatigue – all the fatigue from her past life. She sucked out all my energy. But what did Chuan give me? Upon closer examination, it seems that she gave me nothing at all. When she came, I felt the joy of being a mother, but other than that, what else did I get out of this? After her arrival, I always thought about going back to work. I liked working. It made me feel like myself. I hoped to have the chance to put my skills to use. Actually, it would be enough if I could just satisfy my own selfish desires. But you told me not to work.

Do you want to know what I really want to say to you? This is what I want to tell you, Ren:

Barely a day has gone by that I haven't thought of you. You must think I'm a huge liar to say something like this, but you're wrong. I'm not lying. I can always find you in my thoughts. It's not that I naturally think of you. I enjoy it, it makes me happy both physically and emotionally. I force myself to think of you. I don't do it naturally. I imagine lying in your embrace, but whenever I do everything turns murky, like I'm dreaming. I can't see clearly. It feels like my body is trembling, like my true self is trembling. Why on earth does this happen? I am indeed grieved. My dreams are full of pain. Are these my feelings for you, or is it simply the pleasure of deep sleep?

Why wasn't I loved? Did I not give you enough? I gave birth to an adorable daughter for

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you, didn't I? I've never put so much effort into a relationship with any other man.

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I feel as though I've come back from another place. As if I had traveled somewhere, but can't quite remember where I went. It must have been a relatively uninteresting trip. Maybe it rained, and I just stayed in the hotel the entire time without actually going anywhere. Maybe I simply looked through the misty window with a mixture of regret and shame.

When I awoke from the haze of my trip, I looked at Mei-Chun. It felt strange. I didn't know why she was lying motionless on the floor, why blood flowed from her broken lips and forehead. Several blood-stained sheets of toilet paper lay scattered nearby. She clutched one in her hand. I gazed at her well-rounded figure. Her skin was sleek and soft, but her hands were as coarse as dried-out sponges, and her palms marked with deep, dense lines. Her hands had always been like that, no matter the time of year. They looked dry and lifeless. No matter how much oil she rubbed on them, she couldn't fix it. What had I done? I had come back from far away, and I was more exhausted than anyone else. Who had gone on this journey with me? Or had it not been a journey at all? I only felt that I had come back from somewhere. Not necessarily a trip.

When I came home from work another day, I could sense that no one breathed on the other side of the door. I was used to that. In the past, Mei-Chun would always get home after me. She was a woman who loved to work. Her job was a perfect match for her skills, and her strongest interests. It feels strange to say it. I can't understand how a woman can love something as dull as statistics. Can one have dreams in that line of work? I opened the door; although the house was completely empty, something felt different. The particles floating through the air

felt lighter. Sparser. There were no expectations here. I could sense that the place had slipped into a sort of desperation. Our home seemed to have swallowed the air, an instant serenity filling its confines. Not even the constant sounds of construction work outside could penetrate it.

Then I noticed the paper on the table. I hadn't seen this kind of thing before, of course, but even from far away I could tell that it was an official document. I didn't even have to see what was written on it. The document's aura alone was enough to tell me that "Divorce Settlement Agreement" was typed along the top. I can't even say those words without stammering (can anyone?), but a divorce settlement was indeed on the table. When I walked over and picked it up, I found it as light as a feather. Was this a joke? It weighed as much as an ordinary sheet of paper. I'd expected it to be a little heavier. It should have been some special kind of paper, something with more heft to it. This represented a major life event, after all. It should be made from paper that can last without getting damaged, or at least look a little more official. It should be inside a stern-looking frame – I love anything that's framed – and some heft to accommodate the pain and grief it held.

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Filled with determination, I left home. All I could think of was how violent Ren had been to me. In truth, it had only been that one time, but I was so determined that I forgot all about Chuan. You called and kept demanding that I give her back. I was confused. Why did she have to go back, and not me? In a fit of anger, I refused. You would rest easy, anyway. After all, you'd know that I would take good care of Chuan. You had your own issues to worry about, and you couldn't take care of both me and her.

We could gaze upon the city's tallest broadcast tower from inside our home. It was a major tourist destination, and hundreds of

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thousands of dollars worth of fireworks would explode around it on the eve of the New Year. However, you could only see the tower's pointed tip on a clear day. I would often watch you standing in front of the French doors, deep in thought. Apocalyptic clouds covered the sky like a sheet. On the high-school track spreading below the windows, the red and yellow soccer teams scattered away in fear of the coming storm.

You smoked your Japanese Lucky Strikes with the desperate relish of a prisoner clinging to his hard-won cigarette. The butt, which you had flattened somewhat with your teeth, perched between your index and middle finger. You took short, measured drags, only snuffing it out once you caught the stench of burning filter. When I think of a certain place, my worries carry a similar flavor. I wasn't able to go anywhere after getting married. How often was the yearning I felt for places like this (and even if I didn't consciously yearn for them, I was still compelled to think of them on certain occasions) linked to the passing of time? How often did it actually have to do with the places themselves?

I couldn't live like that, cherishing a nameless grief for a place while wondering what you were thinking as you stood before the window. I had been unaware of what you were thinking for a long time. Perhaps I was thinking of myself too much, but when weren't you? I was a little bit afraid. Even more afraid than I was of your violent tendencies. That violence could be predicted and instigated, and it was also your fault. What I was more afraid of was that gradual feeling of suffocation. It was like the inside of a car, locked and baking in the sun, stuffed with food-encrusted bento boxes, wrappers, empty bottles, plastic bags, and convenience-store magazines, crawling with so many maggots and black flies that they cover the manual windows. But my God, I actually enjoyed that everyday life, that world so small I could touch its borders. The world that surrounded us.

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How long has it been since I've gone on a trip? I like traveling, but not with other people. In college I would occasionally travel with my very, very close girlfriend Lo-Sha. Do you still remember her, Nan? She was in our year. Yet I almost always preferred to travel alone. I liked being by myself. I didn't want to be interrupted by anything at all, like waiting before eating breakfast or heading out together, or deliberating the day's itinerary. I had no choice but to travel with Lo-Sha, which eventually led to a few arguments down the road. I fantasized about doing it alone. Now this is all but an impossibility. I can't go anywhere now. I'm stuck inside this room, unable to be alone. The thought I'll never again have the opportunity to be alone strikes fear into my heart. I'll never be alone for the rest of my life, until I finally die.

Would I want to travel with the college-aged version of you? I still remember very clearly what you were like back then. After you came back from touring the country, you showed me a photograph taken in front of a massive temple. In the photo you were wearing a shabby poncho striped with red, blue, and white, and you were sitting on a red motorbike. A helmet hung from one of the handlebars. Your blue jeans were filthy, and you wore a black backpack.

You were very tan in the picture, but you also looked cute, even delicate. The motorbike was too big for you; you could barely reach the ground with your toes. I recognized the high-tops you always wore. You looked the very image of youth – too young to know your own limitations, riding a motorbike around the island without any preparation. You couldn't even afford a proper raincoat, so you wore that red, white, and blue poncho all day. It was covered with raindrops and streaks of mud. I could almost smell the plastic odor clinging to you.

After you came back, I resented the fact that

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you hadn't told me about your trip beforehand. If you traveled around the island, why didn't you come south to visit me? I was spending the entire summer vacation back home in the south. If you had come, I could have accompanied you for a little while. We could have gone to the peninsula together. I would have been more than willing to spend the nights with you. I was sure that you wouldn't try anything; after all, I was almost twice your size. But why didn't you tell me? And why didn't you try anything with me? Did you have something better to do? And who would want to be with someone as swarthy as you? Did you think about that? Plus, you were a freshman student sporting a crew cut that made you look like a fugitive. Who but someone as odd as I would want to talk to you, spend the entire night with you, stay with you every step of the way? You didn't visit me; instead you went looking for another female classmate. She was so pretty, and her family worked in medicine, but I couldn't care less. I didn't try to compare myself to those kinds of people. I knew that I was worth loving.

Was I right? I don't think so anymore, but I also don't know what became of that girl. Maybe she ended up even worse off than I. If the two of us had gone traveling together, we would have gotten along really well. I'm sure we would never have run out of things to talk about. Just like – do you remember, Nan? For two years, like clockwork, you would meet me after class twice a week. As we walked across that broad campus, sipping our beverages, all the way to the bus that took us to our cram school, we filled every last second with conversation. It was really unbelievable, because neither of us usually liked to talk that much. Come to think of it, our conversations seem really boring now. Back then we would just chat about homework.

I didn't enjoy riding motorbikes; I didn't know how to. A man should be able to drive, but you still can't – can you still call yourself a man? Would I have been able to ride that motorbike

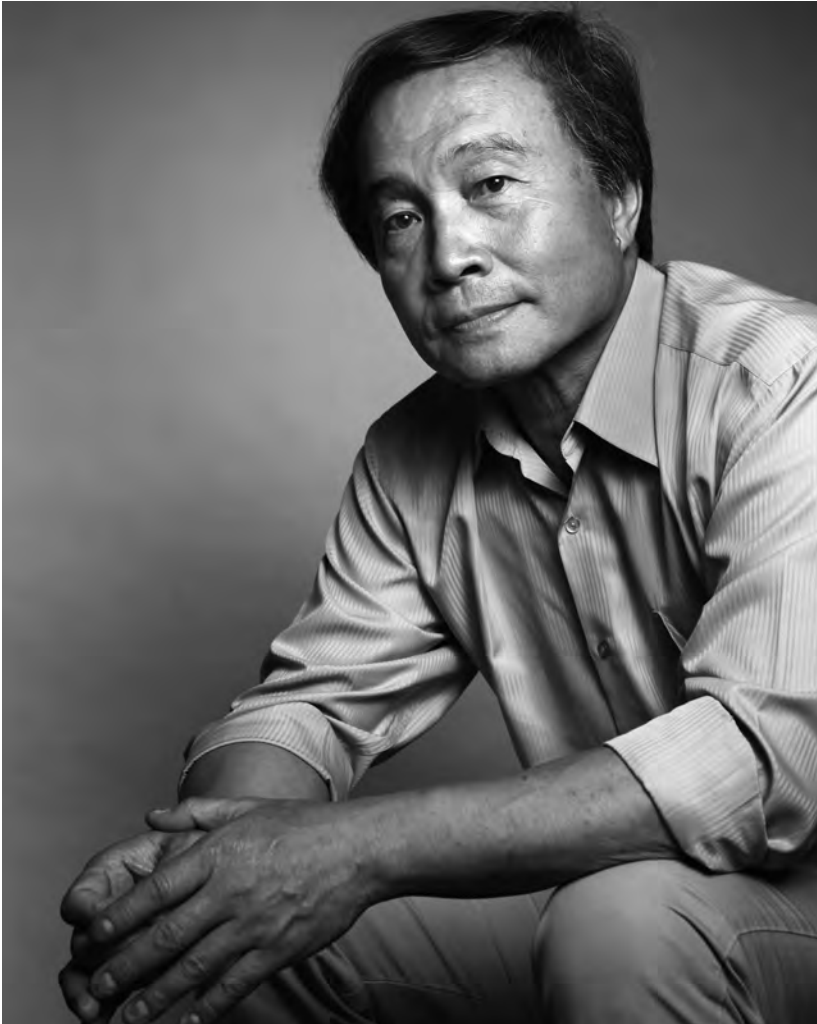
with you back then, and travel around the country? I would have looped my arms around your waist, pressed myself against your tattered poncho, breathing in that sharp plastic smell, and wearing a wet, smelly, suffocating helmet – I wouldn't have been able to stand it. Neither would you, always feeling my chest pressing against you. Even so, we still might have been able to keep talking the entire time. We would have talked as the wind blew against us, as dust and insects flew into my mouth, all the way until we dismounted somewhere and washed our faces. I'm a serious person and a stickler for cleanliness. While I'm far from being "refined", I would never want to travel around this island covered in sweat and dirt. I can't imagine myself being like that before, but now? What right do I have to fantasize about these things now?

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# NINE DAYS AND NINE NIGHTS

## 九天九夜

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## YANG TU

### 楊渡

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  - Rights contact: Grace Chang (Books from Taiwan) [booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com](mailto:booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com)
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- 

Yang Tu engages with many forms of popular expression. He is a poet, essayist, and fiction author who has published collections of poetry (*In the South*), essays (*A Handful of Friends*), and reportage (*The Force of the People*, *The Upheaval of 1945*). He has edited literary magazines and served as assistant editor-in-chief of the newspaper *China Times*. He is also active politically, making his voice heard for democratic as well as literary causes.





The White Terror – almost forty years of political repression and military rule that stood as the longest period of martial law in modern world history when it was lifted in 1987. It pre-dated and pre-defined Taiwanese democracy, shaping the consciousness of everyone who endured it. Yet, as with all great and terrible events in history, trends, periods, and other proper nouns tend to efface the individual psychologies that drive and destroy them.

In *Nine Days and Nine Nights*, Yang Tu is opening those pathways for us again. Four short stories delve into the human depths of the 1980s, invoking the horrors of fragility, loneliness, passion, and human limitation. The title story depicts a provincial election near the end of the Terror, to which a young student, Chang Nien-Tsu, has dedicated his last few months before going abroad. The election is conducted like a war – bribery, intimidation and fraud are rampant. Working feverishly, Chang finds himself moving closer and closer to Tzu-Yu, the daughter of an important backer of the favorite candidate, who works as an assistant to the campaign. Their passion explodes amid the surrounding chaos; yet love and plans are not always compatible, and time waits for no one.

In an age of marches and movements, Yang Tu writes the silent heart. With this first short story collection, we begin to meet a writer who knows people as well individually as together.

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# NINE DAYS AND NINE NIGHTS

By Yang Tu

Translated by A.C. Baecker

Dusk fell quickly in the fall. It was only five thirty but already a beam of gold light passed through the chestnut-lined glass windows by the bookshelf. The light fell onto a crystal award in front of the bookcase, where it was refracted back onto the desk in a star-shape, traveling across stacks of books by the study door. The unexpected gleam of light on the desk made Chang Nien-Tsu squint, and he lifted his head. He realized it was already dusk, and that the light carried the golden hues of the sunset. In a second it would become orange.

“It gets dark so early in the fall.”

The bookshelf was packed so densely with books that the shelves had run out of space, and more books were piled on top of the ones already on the shelves. A stack of articles lay behind the desk along with a few papers he hadn't gone through yet. Books he would never finish reading, articles he would never finish writing, ideas for research he still wanted to explore – there would always be too much to do and not enough time to go do it, so he just passed it onto his students.

As he arranged his books, he thought about the close to twenty-five years he had spent teaching. Next year, he would qualify for retirement, and he planned to start teaching at a new university in the east to earn a little extra on top of his pension. He wanted to travel, and with the extra money he could afford to go see the world.

“Life passes so quickly!”

A few years ago, his wife had retired from her middle school teaching position as soon as she qualified for it. Only a few years over fifty and still in good health, she'd become obsessed with tantric Buddhism. She had studied meditation with some Rinpoche and later went to receive initiations from a Tibetan incarnate master, eventually traveling to India and Nepal for spiritual cultivation with a group of other followers. She went two or three times a year, and could afford the trips with her retirement benefits. He didn't mind the quiet when his wife was gone. At the very least he didn't have to eat all that strange Buddhist food. He always drank and ate red meat as he pleased. His wife wanted him to become vegetarian, to which he retorted: “The only vegetarian thing that I like is fermented fruit, like wine.”

Before retiring, he hoped to edit his publications into two or three volumes of collected work, the culmination of nearly a lifetime's research. Not too long ago, his research assistant had dug out an early article of his, and asked if he wanted to include it. It was old research on regional political parties that he'd written during the period of martial law. The content was a bit underdeveloped, the writing style unsure, and the theoretical citations somewhat flimsy, but using firsthand observations of local elections as research material had been ground-breaking in his field at the time. He pushed the dissertations he still needed to read aside, deciding to look at them



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next week. Tang's phone call came just as he was putting his publications into chronological order.

"Hey, off work yet?" said Tang.

"What work? I've been done with class for a while," he laughed. Tang was his classmate from high school, and they'd attended university together in Taipei. After graduating, he'd gone to Kaohsiung and canvassed for local political campaigns for a while. Eventually he got married, and settled down there, first working as a journalist for a few years before opening a print shop for books on culture. He had a good life.

"Are you free this evening? I'm in Taipei, let's catch up." They'd been friends for a long time, and Tang sounded like he was in a good mood.

"Your timing's perfect – you called just as I was just looking over that article you helped me with on regional political parties. You know, we're both in Taipei. Let's go get a drink," said Chang Nien-Tsu. Today was Friday, his wife was gone, and his kids grown up and living on their own, so who cared what he got up to? Tang had come at just the right time.

"How about this then, I'll take the late train back. I have something I want to tell you," said Tang.

"Whiskey or wine?"

"For tonight, whiskey."

They arranged to meet at a Japanese izakaya place on Linsen North Road that was well-known for its grilled eel, and close to the train station so Tang could catch the train back. They hadn't seen each other for a few years; Tang's hair suddenly seemed to have more grey in it. Chang Nien-Tsu thought his own hair probably looked similarly grey and sparse, but they were old friends and that was to be expected.

Chang Nien-Tsu opened a bottle of twenty-five-year-old Macallan, and said with a laugh, "All these years you've only come drinking once, so drink well."

"At our age, we should drink less wine and drink better wine. That's fine." Tang laughed and

said, "Last year I almost bit the dust."

"What? How did that happen?"

"One day, I got up after my wife had already gone to work, and my kids were at school. I smoked a cigarette and went to the bathroom. As I was sitting on the pot, all of a sudden I felt my stomach seize up, and I couldn't breathe. I thought to myself, this is bad, am I having a heart attack? I have to go to the hospital."

"Did you drive yourself?"

"Yeah, it took everything I had. I couldn't breathe and could barely move my body, but I dragged myself there. I got to the parking lot and into the car, which is thankfully automatic. My house is only five minutes away from the hospital so I drove to the entrance of their emergency room and shouted at them to get a stretcher because I couldn't get out of the car. They came quickly and lifted me onto the stretcher. The doctor there just asked me one question: Where does it hurt? I pointed to my heart. He pressed on it and then said, 'You just barely pulled through.' Then I blacked out."

"And you just came back to life?" Chang Nien-Tsu looked in astonishment upon his friend's slightly leaner face, fearing on his behalf.

"Yeah, life and death in a split second."

"Fuck, so can you still drink?" Chang Nien-Tsu asked with concern.

"It's fine, they put in three stents. I just can't get drunk, my heart can't handle it." Tang laughed good-heartedly.

"Take your time then, don't force yourself to finish." Chang Nien-Tsu raised his glass. "Here. To your new lease on life!"

"That's right, a life returned." Tang took tiny sips. "Twenty-five years, this whiskey smells wonderful!"

"I brought this bottle five or six years ago, so if you do the math it's at least thirty years old – as old as our friendship." The thought that death might have forbade them this moment inspired a surge of gratitude.

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Tang ate his grilled eel with a wild garlic and clam soup. He chuckled, saying, "We thought this food was so great when we were young. But now it's harder on our systems, so we just have a little bit."

"It's fine, drink wine once every lifetime." Chang Nien-Tsu thought of a line from an aboriginal poet, gesturing to the bottle as he said the words.

"I should work out a bit when I get back." Tang said, "You still seem to be in good shape, do you get exercise?"

"Sometimes. At school we get together every week to play ball. I'm still in decent shape."

"Aren't you close to retiring?" Tang asked.

"Very close, next year. The university wants me to stay on for a few more years and retire at sixty, but another university wants to hire me. They've asked several times. I'll start taking my pension next year, and move to the east to teach once I've retired."

"That sounds great. The eastern coastline is beautiful," said Tang.

"Oh, you said you wanted to talk about something earlier. What's up?" Chang Nien-Tsu asked. He knew Tang wasn't the type to ask for help and was worried he had something to say that he wouldn't bring up on his own, so he asked.

"Do you still remember Tzu-Yu? The girl you met when you went south to electioneer before you went abroad?"

"I remember her. Where'd she go? I was never able to track her down again. Is she back?" Chang Nien-Tsu's voice became anxious. Tang's heart attack flashed through his mind, and he was worried he'd hear similar news.

"She was in France for a long time. She studied there, and had been living in Europe." Tang spoke slowly: "A little while ago I heard that she'd studied art management and wanted to come back to Kaohsiung to teach. Do you remember the old county commissioner's family's school? It's become a university now,

and she was supposed to come back to head up the art institute."

"And is she back?" Chang Nien-Tsu asked anxiously. He had an ominous feeling as he looked at Tang's face. Chang Nien-Tsu felt himself hanging on Tang's every word, and as his friend came to those fateful last sentences he wished he were a director who could film the scene in slow motion and drag everything to a stop. But Tang finally said, "The day before she was supposed to return, she passed away."

"Oh, Tzu-Yu!" A pang of grief crossed his heart, and he cried out for her in silence, though outwardly he could only mutter, "How can this be?"

"She had traveled to Africa to research primitive art and religion or something, and came down with some kind of virus. She had the symptoms of a cold and a constant fever. Her doctor didn't know what she had or how to treat it. Less than a week later she died suddenly."

"What strange African disease was this?" Chang Nien-Tsu asked with a tremble in his voice.

"The autopsy said her entire immune system had collapsed, and she died of E. coli. E. coli is one of the most common intestinal bacteria. It's in everyone's bodies, and we come into contact with it all the time, but because her immune system had completely collapsed, it became a deadly infection." Tang sighed.

"Oh Tzu-Yu, why didn't you fight back?" Chang Nien-Tsu asked Tzu-Yu silently, but all he could do was hold his whiskey without speaking. He said nothing for a long time.

He remembered a trip he'd taken to France to attend a conference. At his hotel, he'd seen the silhouette of a woman who looked like Tzu-Yu, only she was wearing a black silk blouse of European design, with a burgundy silk scarf draped over her chest. Her make-up was immaculate and her skin pale. Even though she had Asian features, her cheeks were full and she

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seemed sophisticated. Chang Nien-Tsu turned the memory over in his mind a few times. Yet he hadn't dared to go talk to her.

When he had finally gathered the courage to find her, she was already gone.

And yet he still couldn't understand how the young girl he'd known with the tawny skin and bright eyes of an aborigine, a dimple on her cheek when she laughed, a soft voice and sweet temperament – how could this be? She was gone, truly gone.

“But she was so young, how could this have happened?” He asked Tang despondently.

“After she came back, I was planning to invite you both to come south so we could get together. When we were electioneering, waging war together, we all got along so well.” Tang said, “We would get drunk that year, and stay up all night working on campaign material. She'd be making tea and talking...I had no idea this would happen, *ai!*”

Chang Nien-Tsu poured himself another serving of whiskey. “How could this be? She was so young.” He felt his throat suddenly go dry, and drank his glass.

“May she rest in peace.” Tang downed a glass with him.

Chang Nien-Tsu could never forget that voice he knew so well, her gentle murmur, the warmth of her laughter, the huskiness of her moans....

Chang Nien-Tsu looked around him. The small izakaya restaurant was full of customers, the smell of roast barbeque floating through the air. A smiling girl in a leather jacket pointed at the barbecued skewers she wanted, while whispering into the ear of the man beside her. On the other side of the restaurant, a table with two middle-aged men who looked like businessmen sat with two young girls. They lifted their beer and toasted in Japanese. How could the world carry on like this? This world was so routine, so tedious, so mediocre, so utterly ordinary – how could you not be here? Tzu-Yu,

why aren't you here? Chang Nien-Tsu thought. In a daze, he thought she must have been an illusion from the 1980s. Under the repression of martial law, people spoke of resistance to each other only in whispers, and true feelings could only be revealed during midnight dreams shared with the most trusted. Accumulated passions only had one night to spring forth, transforming into connections that staved off death before silently departing....

“Tang, thank you for asking me to join the campaign, for allowing me to meet Tzu-Yu....” Chang Nien-Tsu drank as he spoke. “I learned so much from the experience. I've been looking over my earlier research recently as I prepare for retirement, and reading an article I wrote back then. It feels like yesterday....” His voice went hoarse, and he couldn't continue.

“We were all young back then, so brazen and willing to risk everything.” Tang smiled, trying to move the topic away from Tzu-Yu. “We had a pretty good time during martial law. When we were out, we were monitored by agents from Garrison Command, and when we were inside they sent their lackeys to get in our business. It was really rather exciting. Now, everything is so normal.”

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# THE FOG CATCHER

## 捕霧的人

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### HUANG WEI-TING 黃暉婷

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  - Publisher: Chiu Ko
  - Date: 9/2016
  - Rights contact: Grace Chang (Books from Taiwan) [booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com](mailto:booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com)
  - Pages: 286
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Though still a new voice on Taiwan's literary scene, Huang Wei-Ting has already garnered serious attention. This student of the celebrated author Wu Ming-Yi (*The Man with the Compound Eyes*) began her postgraduate career as an editor, yet has already begun writing full-time, and has already won several awards.



“The highest goodness,” the philosopher Lao-Tzu said, “is like water,” penetrating every crevice, filling, covering, and leveling, able to take the shape of any container. Young writer Huang Wei-Ting, who writes with the power of water, shows us many human and natural containers in *The Fog Catcher*, her inaugural collection of short stories. A young boy who feels rejected by his family builds a moisture net to catch water after their water supply is cut off, and in doing so reshapes his relationship to his father; one young woman casts off the inconstant affection of her female friends and goes in search of lasting attachment, while another, who has sacrificed job and health security to do the work she loves, negotiates her fear of the city. Clouds, mist, and underground rivers echo and inspire the anxieties, hopes, and desires of her characters, many of whom are “fog catchers” in their own right – individuals engaged in a desperate pursuit of something that seems ephemeral, yet condenses slowly into reality.

Huang Wei-Ting writes with a clear-sighted realism that brings voice and environment together through vivid, seamless descriptions of outer and inner lives. Reading her stories, we follow the human spirit as it is driven from its many sources to the ocean, passing through all sorts of gullies and canals on its way.

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# THE FOG CATCHER

By Huang Wei-Ting

Translated by Eleanor Goodman

## Secret Society

She'd never thought that one day a landlubber like herself would get past her internal struggle and slip happily into the river, feel the powerful current sweep past her body, and catch blurred glimpses of the spray blossoming on the eyelashes of her trembling, half-closed eyes.

The chill of the water invaded her body through her skin. Her back was supported by the many rocks and pebbles along the bottom of the river. She held her breath, her heart thumping from elation and the pressure of the water. The bone-numbing cold couldn't compare to the shock of the water pounding against her eardrums. Still, her excitement overpowered everything, and she felt only her wild heartbeat.

He lay along the riverbed, the man about the same age as her father. She had been pressed down by the weight of the current from his body. She looked at him with curiosity and amusement. His large shoulders showed above the water, and he looked at her with moist eyes.

*Listen.*

He mouthed the word to her. Shifting onto his side, he pushed away some pebbles and pressed his ear against the riverbed. He'd said before that at the bottom of the river, beneath a layer of loose earth, an underground stream moved parallel with the river's surface, flowing past tree roots, plains, rice paddies, bridges, towns and cities, and at last emptying out into the sea. Every river carries its own secret shadow,

these underground rivers that covertly run their own secret society. They had come to lie there on the riverbed to hear the hidden sounds of this underground river.

His strange expression amused her. Bubbles escaped from her nose and from between her teeth. She reminded herself to hold her breath, and to imitate his movements, focusing on her aching eardrums and listening carefully to the invisible fluctuations of energy beneath the riverbed.

*Do you hear it?*

She closed her eyes and pushed her ear closer, her hands pressing flat against the riverbed. Beyond the rush of the water, the colliding pebbles breaking into pieces, the tiny sound waves brushing over her body, underneath the earth's surface throbbed a deeper, less noticeable rhythm that beat faintly against the river and slowly formed its own flow. Her eyes suddenly flew open and looked in surprise at his similar expression.

An underground river. The secret society. She had heard it.

Chelsea let out a lazy yawn, then bent her head and pretended to categorize the documents that had just arrived. She hurriedly wiped away a few teardrops that had oozed out at the corners of her eyes. If she wasn't careful, her section head would notice her. He liked to cause her trouble, and she'd surely be in for another scolding.

The whole district office overflowed with a



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boredom born of uselessness. To one side, her soon-to- retire colleague spread out his third newspaper, and used a magnifying glass to read the already dated news. Behind her, another older colleague had just finished a midday nap and was chatting on the phone. Sitting diagonally in front of her was a young man who had chosen to work as his alternative to military service. Still young and immature, he dared only to tilt his head down a fraction to stare at messages on the cell phone in his lap. In a small town, a government office was like an unsightly skin tumor showing through the top layer of skin. The moment it broke open and spread, it would leave reddish moles that hindered blood flow, difficult to remove and impossible to cure.

A middle-aged man in a uniform suddenly walked into the idle office, carrying a box in both hands and glancing about. No one paid attention to him, or even asked him who he was. Looking up, Chelsea happened to meet his eye.

“I’m from the Express Mail Service.” As though grasping onto a lifesaving floatation device, he locked eyes with Chelsea.

She didn’t catch what he meant at first. “You mean you’re from Direct Mail?”

He nodded, and his unfastened helmet wobbled on his head. His red cheeks and moistened lips looked familiar, as did the bulging, slightly cloudy eyes behind his glasses. Chelsea stood up from her chair, puzzling over her feeling of knowing him from somewhere, trying to remember where they might have met.

“Did you use to deliver things for Link Power Tech? I feel like I’ve seen you before.” Then Chelsea remembered: when she had worked for her old company as an assistant, he had picked up parts and models from her for delivery.

Confused, he scratched his head. “Maybe. Where’s that company? We deliver from a lot of different places.”

Chelsea briefly explained. He remembered that failing company, but he didn’t recall the

woman behind the front desk, so all he could do was force a laugh to cover his awkwardness. She signed for the package, and noticed that he had an anti-nuclear flag tied to his bag. Chelsea smiled approvingly. A few weeks before, she had joined in a march and bought the same flag. It was hanging on the wall of her house.

“Does your company let you display things like that?” Chelsea asked as she handed over the receipt, pointing to the eye-catching flag.

“Why not?” He put the receipt into his waist pack and pulled the zipper shut. Then he added calmly, “I’m a person, I’m against nuclear power, what’s the big deal? Why do you government officials only think about money? Even section heads and magistrates and ministers and the Head of the Executive Yuan shouldn’t just be riding the coattails of Big Business – don’t forget you guys are just people too.”

Chelsea stared in astonishment, then looked back anxiously at her useless colleagues. Fortunately, they were all lost in their own little worlds, and showed no reaction. Her hot-tempered section head had stepped out for a cup of tea and wasn’t in his seat. She looked back at the earnest middle-aged man with some warmth and a newly favorable opinion. “You’re quite an interesting man.”

“My name is Chih Tai-Chuan. People call me Dachuan, but you can call me Nice Guy if you want. In any case, I’m just a man,” he said lightly. “And what should I call you?”

“My coworkers call me Ms. Liu, but you can call me Chelsea.”

“Chelsea – what a cold-sounding name,” Dachuan dropped his eyes bashfully, then glanced up at her one last time. “I’ll remember that.”

His swarthy face seemed to redden. Then after a brief polite thanks, he left the district office, climbed on his motorbike, and rode down the mountain without looking back.

The acrid exhaust from his engine lingered

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in the doorway. Chelsea stood there with the package, thinking of how it was impossible to predict the probability or providence of running into someone. Happy, she went back to her seat, making an inventory of the government brochures the firm had sent over. The dull words were stirred by her fingers and flew past, but her vision was occupied entirely by the image of that bashful figure imprinted on her retina. Her boss milled around behind her, rebuking her harshly for slacking off, but she didn't seem to hear, lost as she was in that strange and wonderful hint of fate.

As though propelled by an invisible hand, Chelsea took off her helmet, locked her motorbike, and walked toward the group, keeping her eye on the broad shadow that stood out so conspicuously amidst the crowd of young people.

"Dachuan?" She was eighty percent certain of what she'd seen, hoping to set eyes on that familiar, weathered face.

Dachuan turned toward the voice, hesitantly at first, then in surprise. "Shirley?"

"Chelsea."

"Oh! I'm getting old, my memory isn't what it was." Dachuan patted his head underneath the large-brimmed cap. "So you've come to help clean up the river too?"

Chelsea nodded. She saw a shy smile rise in Dachuan's dark eyes, and couldn't help but feel a little shiver go through her. They both turned to look at the river as though by some agreement. This was a highly symbolic river. Its origin and outlet were both in the same jurisdiction, so naturally the locals felt a strong attachment to it. They stood near the middle and lower reaches, which fortunately still showed some dynamic wildness. Once it passed under the bridge a bit downstream from them, it would flow by the dense cityscape of buildings and people. There, the torrents were tamed by concrete banks and became mere lifeless scenery.

Chelsea stole a glance at Dachuan's deep eyes and the slightly upturned corners of his mouth, and descended into giddy disbelief. She'd never thought that in the perpetual explosion of announcements on Facebook, Dachuan would see the same modest solicitation and volunteer to clean up the river that day. She knew he was against nuclear energy, but she hadn't thought he'd also be so interested in other environmental issues he would join the efforts personally. So he wasn't just a grumpy middle-aged man; his passions could still rule his body.

The organizer finished calling roll and gave each person a pair of waders, waterproof gloves, and long metal grabbers, all donated by people who couldn't participate that day. They put on the rain boots they'd brought and rolled up their sleeves, waiting for the organizers to divide them into groups. Chelsea and Dachuan stuck close to each other and ended up paired together. He carried a burlap trash bag, and she followed behind him, stepping carefully over the slippery riverbed into the spot they'd been assigned. Sunlight glinted in the ripples. Although protected by their waders, the deep water's unfamiliar chill penetrated down to their skin and made them shiver.

They started out by gathering the flotsam visible on the surface: plastic bottles, slippers, a drying rack, medicine bottles, plastic folders, a beat-up old basketball, face masks, deflated bicycle tires. There was even an old wedding photo and an used pregnancy test, still clearly showing two purple lines.

"How can there be so many plastic bags?" Dachuan was sparing no effort to grab the trash that had gotten caught along the rocky shore and among the waterweeds, draining the water out of each bag and stuffing it into the trash bag, which was getting heavier and heavier.

"Don't lots of people call the president a jellyfish? Well, I think he's a plastic bag. Jellyfish may not have brains, but at least they're food for



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the turtles and sunfishes, and that makes them a necessary part of the ecology. Whereas plastic bags are a thousand-year curse. Not only do they not degrade over time, but they're poisonous to the sea creatures. They can hurt them or kill them, and isn't that just like our brilliant 'nine-percent-approval' president? Let's not insult the jellyfish anymore. We should start a new trend and rename the president a plastic bag."

Chelsea was tickled by the joke, and she laughed so hard that she had to put a hand on her aching stomach and steady herself on the uneven riverbed with the grabber. "You're a real netizen, it's hilarious!"

"Sorry, I really shouldn't talk about your boss that way, huh," he said, feigning a nervous apology, though his amused expression never changed.

"I'm not a public servant. I'm just a contract employee...."

"Really? Then you must come from some special kind of background. You're not a general's daughter, are you?"

"I don't have any special background. I just got lucky. The head of personnel is my school friend's uncle. So."

"So you do have connections, you bigwig."

She pretended to be angry and whacked Dachuan's arm. His muscles looked slack, but the feel of them comforted her, and her hand unconsciously lingered there. He didn't object or subtly resist. They kept their light contact, their attention slowly shifting from the litter in the river to their conversation. The development of green energy. Unfair social policies. The "black box" economy. Ideals vs. reality. Dachuan used all the youthful catchwords when he talked about current affairs, couching his realism with dark humor. He was not nearly as stolid or staid as his age suggested, and his dark eyes gave hints of a hidden world. Moreover, most of his values were perfectly in line with Chelsea's.

They continued to chat as they picked up

litter. Perhaps it was excitement, or thirst, or leaning over and standing back up, or the stifling wading pants, but the summer heat clung to Chelsea's skin; she began to feel more and more overheated, and less and less like herself. She stood up and turned her face to the sky. The intense sunlight overpowered her, and she suddenly felt dizzy. Her legs weakened, and became no match for the current. She began to fall toward Dachuan.

He caught her, and found that her body was hot and dry. It was likely heatstroke. The organizer was up ahead in the middle reaches, and the other volunteers were concentrating on the trash in their sections and hadn't noticed anything amiss. Dachuan put an arm around Chelsea's waist and propped her up under the shoulder as he helped her slowly up the bank. He sat her down under the thin shade of the nearest tree, and took off his cap, depositing it on Chelsea's head. "I've been sweating a lot, so it kind of smells."

A scent like rotting wood descended on her. Her sense of smell went a bit dull, but she didn't mind the odor. She looked blurrily at Dachuan, and murmured her thanks. She noticed with shock that his newly revealed head was completely bald. His wide forehead spread back unimpeded to his delicate scalp that showed not the slightest trace of hair – not even a hint or hope of it, just a tangle of white around his ears like a thick, unbecoming headband. It was the first time she'd seen Dachuan without his hat, and it turned out he was balding. All at once, he seemed pathetic.

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# FOR REAL

## 真的

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## MARULA LIU 劉梓潔

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**M**arula Liu knew from a young age that she wanted to be a writer. Her publishing career started after winning the 2003 Uritas Newcomer Fiction Prize for her story “Blinded,” but she only decided to pursue it full time after her essay “Seven Days of Mourning,” a deeply personal reflection on the pain of losing her father, won the Lin Rung-San Literary Award. Her first collection of essays of the same title was a huge hit in Taiwan, selling over 70,000 copies. The movie *7 Days in Heaven*, which was adapted from her essay, hit US\$1.5 million at the box office, and won Liu the 2010 Golden Horse Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. Her writing is heavily influenced by Lawrence Block, with its taut elegance tinged with cynicism.



\* 2016 Asia Weekly Top Ten Chinese Novel of the Year

Anyone who has ever run into a Tinder bot knows how frighteningly real internet scams can be. In *For Real*, young novelist Marula Liu takes us to the heart of that deception and beyond, into a world where stories and people composed out of thin air transform into reality.

Professional ghostwriter Chen Liang-Liang has just gotten an excellent gig: the well-known author Chung-Ling has hired her to write a novel about a woman who is swindled on an online dating site, someone who finds love, then discovers it's all a fraud. Yet just as Chen Liang-Liang fills a fictional world with con games and scam artists, she discovers that she is a mark herself. Chung-Ling had been making online connections under Chen's name and "writing" books through other people until sickness drove her into a coma, at which point her agent took over all her affairs.

If this weren't enough, Chen Liang-Liang now begins to see characters from her story appearing in her own life. What is going on, she wonders – are these people real? Could she have been writing a true story all along? Marula Liu employs a wide variety of textual formats and plot transformations to achieve a stunning (and, given the story, disorienting) degree of verisimilitude, leaving us to wonder with the protagonist: What is real, and do I really want to know?

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# FOR REAL

By Marula Liu

Translated by Roddy Flagg

## Chapter 2

### Li Chen-Yu One to Li Chen-Yu Twelve

Li Chen-Yu would, had he not been a conman, have made a fine archivist.

It wasn't just the record of basic information pertaining to the twelve Li Chen-Yus – their family backgrounds, their ups and downs, joys and sorrows, their touching little anecdotes. It was the files on all the women that were truly impressive. Personal info harvested from the Internet, every picture they'd ever sent him, the daily texts and such, all printed out and filed into manila folders, just like your medical records at the hospital. And wasn't that what the women were looking for when they registered on the dating sites? A prescription to cure some illness, some heartbreak? Maybe that was why, if passions were suitably inflamed, sending the magic phrase "The doctor's coming to examine you!" to several hundred women would, remarkably and to the great surprise of the Li Chen-Yus, result in several spread-legged nudes being sent in reply.

Weren't they worried all those print-outs might one day become evidence for the prosecution? Of course they were, so only files for targets "in progress" were maintained. Originally they had thought working from electronic copies alone would be enough, not knowing Li Chen-Yu Eight (a clumsy fellow) would one day trip over a cardboard box while carrying a pot of noodle soup back to his desk

and invent hard disk soup. The files of all those women so desperately in need of treatment dissolved within. They had no choice but to start over, breaking who knows how many hearts in the process. But without those records, the twelve Li Chen-Yus had no hope of putting it all back together – had it been Emma or Ella? Did she direct films or sell cinema tickets? Or was she the Taipei estate agent? You can get away with calling out the wrong name in the heat of love-making, but not in a lunchtime text. Better to stay safe and ditch the lot than risk problems in the future. What else could they do? "Sorry, I slipped and banged my head this morning and can't remember a thing, except how important you are to me. Could you just remind me of everything we've said and done?"

Anyone who fell for that dubious a line would deserve to be let off for intense stupidity. Moreover, different women had been drawn into different levels of attachment, and had to be handled individually.

If an regular online contact suddenly disappears, women merely lament the unreliability of men online and then get on with their lives. She'll be over it even before the website membership shows up on the credit card bill. Some things just don't work out. A class is cancelled, a gym goes bust. You don't weep outside the door. You move on.

If it had been someone who only yesterday swore to spend the rest of his life with her, though, she would obsess about it. Amnesia after

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a car accident? Struck by a serious illness? Fled angry debtors? Disappeared from the face of the earth? The more phlegmatic of them might opt to dismiss the whole thing. Those less so would gather together all available photographs, post missing person notices online, and phone his alleged employers, who would be unaware of his existence. Eventually some fellow victim would leave a reply: "He's a fraud, he did the same to me. The photos are fake, I hope you didn't send him any money..."

"What? A scam?" It would be unbearable. "Am I that stupid?" They'd phone the anti-fraud hotline and list each and every detail for the policeman on the other end of the line. And weary old Constable Abe would ask a single question in response:

"Did you send him any money?"

"No."

"No? Well if you didn't, there's been no fraud, so there's no crime to report."

"What about my time? My hurt feelings?"

"That's your affair. Just be glad you didn't send him any money; if you didn't lose any money, you haven't been defrauded. Online dating's dangerous, so be careful. The National Police Agency has your best interests at heart."

"The hell it does! I've given you a name, a phone number, his identity number, his employer, and the account he used! Can't you even look into it?"

Constable Abe would remain calm: "Miss, I've noted it all down. But you need to understand that these are fake names, fake phone numbers, fake identity numbers, fake companies and fake accounts. We estimate there are eight thousand of these fake identities being used, and we can't catch them all. Just be glad you didn't send any money."

"Why can't you be a bit more proactive! If you weren't all so lazy...! You're a waste of taxpayers' money, and this is why it'll keep happening! What if it had been your daughter,

or your wife, or your mother!?"

"I understand you're angry, Miss, but please do try to stay calm and accept some responsibility here. What you need to do now is get your life back on track. Is there anything else I can be of assistance with?"

The woman, past anger and now into hopelessness, summoned the energy for one final snarled demand: "You've got to catch him!"

"Police and Public in Partnership,' Miss. We'll do our best."

And she knew that that too was a lie. Cheated again. But at least now she knew what was true and what wasn't. All thanks to Li Chen-Yu.

After several days of brooding she would write up the whole sorry tale, every text and voice message from start to finish, to post wherever possible online. This would alert Li Chen-Yu Eleven and Twelve, responsible for counter-intelligence, who would print the whole thing for everyone to have a good laugh over: "Who wrote that one? Check to see who was on duty that day," and "Seven inches and always hard!?" and then "What's this? A diamond ring isn't good enough for you, I'll bring you the moon instead!? How tacky can you get?"

These were the only occasions on which Li Chen-Yu Nine and Ten would come and join the fun. Normally they stayed in their corner, silently fabricating credit cards, ID cards, and passports, as well as fake bankbooks showing large long-term deposits. They'd look to see which pieces of their work had made it online – "that passport photo's a bit off, need to watch the ratios," and "Ah, that photo of that eligible bachelor is online now, we'll have to stop using those." "Shame," Nine would complain. "We'd not used those ones from a wine tasting and of him opening a bottle of champagne in business class." "Nonsense," said Ten. "We'll just swap the face out. I'll 'Shop it."

It all felt much like a break from lessons at school. But soon enough Li Chen-Yu One would ring the bell and send them all back to work –

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back to their chatting, typing, and forgery.

Those who'd already transferred money were a different story. Some would be persuaded to make second and third transfers after the first – no point passing up on an easy mark, Li Chen-Yu always said. The best line was always the lottery one: "I bought a ticket in your name, and you won the jackpot! Sweetheart, you're a lucky charm. But you'll need to open an account here in Hong Kong. Send some money to do that and they'll pay the prize in. Then we can start our happy life together."

"But what lottery is it? Is this safe? Can I check?" To which Li Chen-Yu would respond: "It's a new one, only goes on sale to the public next month. I managed to get a ticket through a friend – I'd told him we were getting married and he said if it won it could be our wedding present, wasn't that kind? I showed him your photo, he said we'll make a lovely couple."

Once all possible money had been extracted Li Chen-Yu would disappear. Some didn't report it – a price paid for a lesson learned, they said. The truly infatuated might even have borrowed money from friends and family, taking the lies they were told and lying to others in turn, thereby becoming frauds themselves. Yet the debts still stood, and they'd swear to work hard and pay it off. And then there were those like Ma Tsui-Tsui, for whom the money lost was a mere rounding error on her savings account. Yet conscience drove her to report it, which led to the following documentary record:

Officer: So why did you believe this Li Chen-Yu when he told you he was buying a house for you both?

Ma Tsui-Tsui: He sent me lots of photos of all the different rooms, with him in them. He said his assistant took them. It was exactly as he'd described it, and they didn't look fake....

Officer: Did he ask you to send him money?

Ma Tsui-Tsui: No. He said he had to make a down payment but didn't have the cash on hand,

so he was going to mortgage his own house. I told him not to, that I'd send him the money.

Officer: Oh, so you've got too much money?

Ma Tsui-Tsui: No, I just don't like owing people.

Officer: That's something he'll have taken advantage of.

Ma Tsui-Tsui: Whatever....

Officer: Was he in touch again after that?

Ma Tsui-Tsui: Yes. We spoke and he said he'd be in Taiwan two days later, and that he'd bought lots of presents for my adoptive mother and my staff here. He showed me photos: pearl powder, peanut brittle, lots of things all neatly stacked up next to his luggage. All his shirts were in his case, neatly folded.

Officer (sighing): And then?

Ma Tsui-Tsui: Two days later I asked him in the morning what flight he was on. He said he didn't know; you can always get a seat in business class, he said, he'd just have his secretary call once he was on the way to the airport. And he said that he was going to be here for a week, so that afternoon he'd spend in meetings sorting out company business, and that would run very late. Then he stopped replying to my messages and gifts, so I just thought he must be busy. But when he still hadn't replied by midnight, I phoned him; there was no answer, and I started to wonder. I couldn't sleep – just sat up reading about online scams. And I saw it isn't all about shares and lottery wins – the way he conned me with the house is another one. So the more I read the more nauseated I felt, and I realized I'd been scammed, so I just turned the computer off and went to bed. When I woke up there was a message from him, but I ignored it and he didn't send any more.

Officer: What did it say?

Ma Tsui-Tsui: "Sleep tight. I love you."

Had he not been a conman, Li Chen-Yu would have made a fine sound engineer – or more



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accurately, a sound designer. That was the job of Li Chen-Yu Five and Six. The other ten could never figure out how the two of them managed to create a Dolby surround sound environment with such basic equipment. Five and Six, like all behind-the-scenes workers, were dismissive of their own efforts: "It's just good training, and sticking to the golden rule."

"What golden rule?"

"Make her think she's there, but never know we're there too."

Their entry-level product featured Li Chen-Yu saying "I'm driving," within a complex sonic background including the purr of a high-end motor and the bass notes from an equally high-end stereo playing a Western classic or some jazz, plus the occasional passing car horn or ambulance siren. The women would fill in the blanks all by themselves: Li Chen-Yu with one hand on the wheel, his other hand pressing the phone to his ear to talk to her, occasionally adding: "I love this song. Let me turn it up so you can hear it...." Elvis. Love me tender, love me true.

They'd already succumbed by that point, but Li Chen-Yu had one last blow to land: "When you're here I won't need to hold this phone any more. I can hold your hand instead."

It wasn't the expensive car that made him cool, it was driving it one-handed. But the coolest of all was that they could make the women imagine him doing that purely with sound effects.

Five and Six did have one difference of opinion on their work: Five regarded *Christmas at Tokyo Station* as their masterpiece:

Li Chen-Yu would tell a woman he was going to visit old friends in Tokyo, and would drop in on his daughter from a previous marriage who was studying in the city. On arriving at Tokyo Station he would send a photo of the Christmas tree on the concourse and follow up with a phone call. "Did you see it?" She would

hear announcements in Japanese, the sounds of travellers rushing back and forth, and now and then the squeals of young Japanese girls. "It's too noisy here," he would say. "I'll go outside." "Don't, it must be freezing." "Oh, I don't mind."

He would stay on the line as he walked across the concourse, past the bento box sellers hawking their wares and out of the station. It would then quieten and he would say he was on a walkway outside the station. She would imagine him there, clutching his phone, breath white in the cold. She would fill in the blanks: Her Li Chen-Yu, clad in a long tan coat and a short check scarf. Were she in Tokyo he would embrace her, wrapping her in that same coat. "Oh, I wish you were here," he'd say. Now cue footsteps, firm and clear. This was the signal for an important bit player, waiting patiently by, to take the stage: The station master. Coming on shift, clad in a smart blue uniform, a dusting of snow on cap and shoulders. As he passes he touches the peak of his cap courteously. His face, she sees, is that of the great Japanese cinema heartthrob, Ken Takakura.

"We can make them see Ken Takakura using only sound effects," said Five. "Now that's skill."

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# CALL ME UP IN DREAMLAND

## 抵達夢土通知我

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### WOLF HSU 臥斧

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- 

One of Taiwan's best-known and best-loved young writers, Wolf Hsu has been working with words his entire life. He has published several works of fiction, including *The Circus Leaves Town*, *No One Knows I'm Gone*, and *Boulevard of Broken Dreams* (see BFT Issue 1), all while steadily rising through the ranks of digital publishing to become deputy editor-in-chief at Taiwan's largest e-book platform.





It's M. Night Shyamalan's *Unbreakable* meets modern politics: A strong, young man who lost his memory in a train crash discovers he can read the memories of others through physical contact. Widespread political unrest throws him into a situation he cannot escape except by his own bravery and ingenuity.

The scene is a moment of political revolution, a student takeover of Taiwan's legislative building nearly identical to the events of the Sunflower Movement. One night, while leaving the sit-in, our protagonist runs into a Filipino woman who is clearly escaping someone; she is half-naked, mutilated, and losing consciousness. The protagonist literally runs to the hospital, and her memories begin to seep into his mind. The police name him as a suspect in her murder, but life grows even more complicated when a friend asks him to help search for his missing sister. As the body count begins to mount, our protagonist decides that he must go after the killer himself.

Wolf Hsu's newest novel has been hailed by domestic critics as one of the best works of "hard-boiled fiction" to appear to date. Its gritty language and stark descriptions of the macabre are sure to attract any devoted fan of *The Watchmen*, *Sin City*, or even *Saw*. Part of its brilliance, however, also derives from its connection to the moment – as a darkness incubating in a corner while Taiwan is rocked by political upheaval.

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# CALL ME UP IN DREAMLAND

By Wolf Hsu

Translated by Jeremy Tiang

*“In the heat of the night, I’m a feelin’ motherless somehow.” – Ray Charles*

## 1.

I held her in my arms as questions jostled for room in my brain, leaving no space for thought.

She wasn’t tall, and through the bath towel she was wrapped in, I could feel her fleshy, voluptuous body shaking non-stop. It was late March, and the night air in this city still had a hint of chill. Under the towel, she wore only underwear, and as my gaze drifted downward, I could see her deep cleavage in the gap the towel left exposed.

Sadly, I wasn’t in the mood to admire a woman’s curves just then.

Her cheekbones were badly bruised, her lip split, and her eyes surrounded by swollen, dark circles. Red and purple scars criss-crossed her naked arms, and her chest was smeared with blood. Tracing the path of the gore, I found its source: two bloody holes on either side of her head where her ears should have been.

The wounds were jagged, suggesting the ears had been yanked hard, then sawn off with a blunt knife or scissors. They looked fresh, though the blood that flowed down her face and torso was now dry, which meant it happened more than a few minutes ago, but definitely within the last hours.

That is to say, while I was pounding the sidewalk earlier on, pausing now and then to sit

and listen to a speech, she may have been getting assaulted just a few blocks away.

\*

About a week ago, a member of the legislature defied protocol and rammed through an extremely controversial bill. To protest this, several civic organizations gathered in front of the Legislative Building, many of them students concerned about the current political situation. Some of these students took advantage of reduced security after hours to barge into the debating chamber, where they staged a sit-in. Others broke through the police cordon, and soon occupied the main chamber. That night, the police tried sending in reinforcements, but the students managed to keep them out by blocking the doors with chairs. The police pulled back, defeated, but didn’t withdraw. Instead, they began a stand-off with the students.

Within a few hours, all sorts of civic groups had heard the news, and came to stand in solidarity with the students. Fearing escalation would lead to protesters getting hurt, some regular people also showed up to hold a vigil next to the building.

Over the next few days, the crowds of students and citizens outside the Legislative Building continued to increase. Donated supplies, first aid teams, and legal organizations kept showing up to offer assistance as well as to make a stand, lending their support to the movement. Student representatives of the occupiers demanded a dialogue with

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government leaders over the bill. As the leaders were busy denouncing the protest to the media, rather than taking it seriously, the situation remained unresolved.

That's roughly what I understood from watching the news, anyway.

I'd seen many reports online about overseas protests, and was prepared for tense face-offs between citizens and the police around the Legislative Building, the officers holding up riot shields and batons, protesters reaching down to pick up broken bricks or cement chunks to fling into the fray.

After a short while there, I realized it wasn't like I'd imagined.

The civic organizations staging the sit-in outside the building had invited scholars from various fields to give short speeches, explaining the objectives of the movement and the problems with the bill. Public figures such as actors and musicians were joining in too, while regular folk motivated purely by concern for the students and the bill were also taking the stage to voice their observations and experiences. The site of the protest had become that rare, precious thing: a public classroom open to all.

I mingled with the crowd – the atmosphere was indescribable.

Some members of the public got up on stage to explain why they'd wanted to come and speak. It turned out some had rushed there straight from work, and others had even taken leave and traveled in from elsewhere just so they could take part.

My work wasn't fixed, but depended on how pressing or complicated the tasks the boss assigned me were, so I ought to have had plenty of free time. Unlike these zealous activists, though, while I'd assiduously followed news of the protest, it had never occurred to me to lend my support in person.

In the end, I wasn't sure what this movement would actually be able to accomplish.

Besides, when I did get there, I found the protest much calmer than I'd imagined.

The chamber couldn't stay occupied forever. The government's current tactic seemed to be to stonewall them, and hope that as time passed, the movement would run out of steam.

My colleague Beast didn't think this would work.

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Beast was a big guy – his shirt barely closed over his bulging muscles, the buttons in perpetual danger of popping off. Like me, he worked at the night club, handling the valet parking and keeping order at the entrance. He also had to deal with all sorts of trouble whenever it arose. In other words, Beast was the night club's bouncer, and worked for a set number of hours every night.

The year before, his grandmother – who had raised him alone – passed away, partly because of a levy imposed on their family-owned farm. After that, Beast began paying more attention to various civic movements. Even if he hadn't done much to help while his granny was alive, at least he could lend a hand to other people being bullied by the authorities.

And so, starting from the first night the debating chamber was occupied, Beast showed up at the Legislative Building every day.

"Having more people at the scene makes it less likely the police will dare to disperse us by force," he told me. "Didn't the Speaker publicly state they wouldn't send in the police against the students? That proves our presence there is doing some good."

I believed the meaning behind the Speaker's proclamation wasn't that simple. Everyone knew there were all kinds of power struggles raging within the ruling party, and it was an open secret that the Speaker didn't get on with the Party Leader. For all we knew, this might be nothing more than a tactical maneuver. Yet seeing Beast take this so seriously, I didn't want to shut him

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down. As a friend, all I could do was take over his shifts as the night club's bouncer.

When the weekend came, it was hard for Beast to take time off.

Saturday nights were always the busiest, especially around midnight, when all kinds of shenanigans would kick off. Sometimes there'd be too much for Beast and Blondie, the other fixer, to deal with, and they'd rope me in. A few hours before this, I'd been having supper nearby when I got a call from Beast. At first I thought he was summoning me back to the night club for help.

"Can you go down to the protest for a while?" he said instead. "I'm stuck here."

He told me that a few hours ago, a group of protesters had forced their way into the Administrative Building, which was just a few streets away from the Legislature. The sit-in and speeches were going on as before, but someone had gotten in touch with Beast to say they could do with back-up.

"I'm afraid there'll be trouble," said Beast. "Do me a favor and go have a look."

\*

When I got there, I had no idea what I was supposed to be doing, and ended up walking around aimlessly. Cartoons and slogans mocking the government were everywhere – along the perimeter walls and sidewalks, on the railings of the pedestrian bridge, and even atop the spikes of the police barrier. Walking amongst them felt like being at an outdoor art exhibit. After one of the speeches, the emcee mentioned that the police presence around the Administrative Building had increased dramatically, and water cannons were rolling in. Everyone was urged not to avoid violence, and stay safe.

I left the sit-in and walked over to the Administrative Building. The speeches could be heard from outside, and the number of police with riot shields and batons had indeed swelled significantly. The situation looked stable, though;

neither side was spoiling for a fight. After a while, more of the crowd from the Legislative Building came over to continue their sit-in here. Their thinking was probably the same as Beast's: greater numbers would discourage the police from acting out.

It was almost one in the morning, and the scene felt calm. I decided that a clash didn't seem likely; Beast was being over-anxious. I texted him to say everything was fine. After a moment's thought, I decided to walk to my gym, where I'd get some exercise before heading home to bed.

After a couple of blocks, I pulled off my mask and turned into an alleyway. That's where I ran into her.

## 2.

The streetlights were dim around here. I noticed her as she approached, her steps unsteady. But when I realized she wasn't wearing shoes, I looked more closely: she was wrapped in a towel, barefoot, wandering alone in the middle of the night. Something must be wrong.

I hurried over. Seeing this, she started stumbling faster too. I sped up, and she crashed right into me, breathing hard as she gabbled some words, then fainted dead away.

Her pronunciation was off, and she mixed accented English with Chinese. That, plus her light brown skin and features made me guess she was from Southeast Asia. Perhaps the Philippines, where English was an official language? Was she an overseas bride who'd just moved here? Or a foreign domestic worker? She repeated certain words over and over, like "Help," "Terrible" and "I've been attacked." A dispute with her in-laws or employer? How had she ended up so badly beaten, even her ears sliced off? Or was this unrelated to her marriage or work, and she'd just been unlucky enough to encounter some bad guy?

I looked around. No blood on the road,

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so it was hard to say which building she'd run from. This neighborhood was full of old apartment buildings, packed close together. The alleyway was silent; no one was chasing her, and if her tormentor hid nearby, I couldn't spot him. Frowning my brows, I noticed she was suddenly shivering much harder as I held her – convulsing, rather. Her injuries were probably worse than they looked; the vicious attack must have left less visible wounds too.

This was dangerous. I swept aside the questions popping into my brain, pulled out my phone, and dialed 119. Talking fast, I said there was a seriously injured person and told them roughly where we were.

“We'll send a vehicle right away,” said the operator calmly. “Your location is close to the protest, so the ambulance might take a while to get through.”

“How long?”

“Twenty to thirty minutes.”

Half an hour? Given her condition, every second was precious. “Where's the nearest hospital?” I asked.

He told me the address. I quickly calculated that going all out, I could get there in ten minutes.

No time to waste. I scooped her up in my arms, and took off at a sprint.

\*

There weren't many cars or people around at this time of night, so I ran six red lights on the way, and made straight for the ER.

The duty nurse was clearly startled by me showing up after midnight wearing dark glasses, and breathing so hard I couldn't speak; I must have looked like a maniac. Then her professionalism kicked in, and the injured woman in my arms got all her attention. She grabbed the phone, and two medics appeared wheeling a bed. They got her into an examination room right away.

I hadn't looked at my watch, so couldn't say

how long it had taken me, but probably longer than I'd expected. Though I had ignored traffic rules and red lights, she was much heavier than I thought. Freed of my burden, I bent over, panting, almost too weak to stand upright. Trying to slow down my heart as it beat hard against my chest, I wondered: should I spend more time on the treadmill, and increase my weight training?

A funny line of thought, because I wouldn't encounter situations like this very often. Yet now that I'd stopped running and my brain could work again, scrambled images from my mad dash kept coming into focus.

### 3.

Two years ago, I was in a train derailment.

The middle two carriages buckled violently, flinging many passengers from the train, myself included. I flew the farthest, and landed face down; then I rolled a few times and slid, face in the dirt, down a slope. My anti-social separation from the group kept the rescue workers from finding me. If the boss hadn't happened to pass along the low road and seen me there, I might have breathed my last on that grassy verge.

When I woke up, I had no idea who I was – and had no ID on me. Apart from the boss, no one came to visit me the whole time I was in the hospital. The boss paid for my medical expenses, and arranged for me to work at the night club after I was discharged, so I could pay my debt back in installments. The boss even cleared a space for me to live in the night club's cellar. As far as I was concerned, the boss had not only saved my life, but also given me the help I needed to go on living.



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# THE GRAND CANDIDIUS HOTEL

## 歡迎光臨康堤紐斯大飯店

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### LEE PO-CHING 李柏青

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Grace Chang  
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In his ideal world, Lee Po-Ching is a professional writer who practices law on the side; unfortunately, reality is exactly the opposite. The well-known crime writer and essayist has published several books, including the historical novel *The Destruction of Shu*, and the mystery novels *Dearest You* and *The Last Train Home*.



Welcome, dear guests, to the Grand Candidus Hotel: a five-star establishment complete with all the best accoutrements and modern facilities, a marriage of high style and elegance, a jewel overlooking the lake – truly a paradise on earth.

Or it was, until the morning its owner, Pai Wei-To, was found dead on a jogging path, with water in his lungs and a bullet in his back. An ensuing investigation carried out in this beautiful place of leisure begins to peel back one layer of intrigue after another. A famous avian biologist, a retired policeman, a lawyer with old ties to the victim's family, and an infamous criminal all surface in the case, but while everyone's guilty of something, no one was meant to die.

Veteran crime novelist Lee Po-Ching leads us down into the darkness, spinning riddles with riddles, unveiling a dark world beneath a beautiful surface. The hotel's inner world, like the book's narrative, is mercilessly captivating: as the Eagles famously sang, "you can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave."



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# THE GRAND CANDIDIUS HOTEL

By Lee Po-Ching

Translated by Alexander Clifford

## Prologue

In 2015, the travel magazine *Crowded Sun* had this to say about the Grand Candidus Hotel:

The Candidus has everything a five-star hotel ought to have: comfortable rooms, good service, in-house spa, excellent cuisine and a quality wine list....Yet beyond that, the hotel is a dreamlike creation tucked away in the last patch of untouched scenery in Taiwan's central mountains. It perches on a two hundred-foot cliff above the blue waters of a perfect alpine lake, its two pure white wings outstretched like an angel's, embracing every shade of blue and green. You will scarcely mind the hundreds of stone steps you have to descend, when you find yourself immersed in nature on the narrow pathway between the cliff and the edge of the lake. What is that lapping, rustling, blowing sound? It is the ancient hymn of the forest. It is the drumming of this island's heartbeat.

But Prosecutor Wang Chun-Ying was in no mood to listen to hymns or heartbeats. As his department-issue car sped along the highway around the lake, Wang cursed himself for the bad decisions he'd made since last night.

"Shooting death of the Chairman of the Board of the Grand Candidus Hotel."

The name of the case alone indicated that it would be dangerously complicated. There would be political factors and big money, the public and the press. It might cause ripples beyond the local, up to the seats of national power. And it

just had to happen on the first of January, 2016, when his wife and son were away in Japan, and Wang had arranged four days of uninterrupted leave for himself. It should have had nothing to do with him, if only that silly bitch from Fung Section hadn't broken her leg at a New Year's Eve party. What was she doing going to New Year parties at her age? Better if she'd broken her damn neck. And how did she know about Wang and Chia-Fen? Had she seen them at a motel? Had Chia-Fen told her?

Ratted out. Wasn't that just the story of his life? He was middle-aged, and he had been pushed about as long as he could remember. He had never done anything of note, and never managed to ride on anyone else's coattails, either. But he'd had plenty of practice handling the crap no one else wanted to deal with. Now he wasn't going to be able to afford to send his boy to a decent school overseas, his wife was just about ready to ask for a divorce, and Chia-Fen was going to leave him because he wasn't buying her any Chanel bags. Prosecutor Wang Chun-Ying, pride of his university, Prosecutor Level 12, the Republic of China's last line of defense against lawlessness, had little to look forward to beyond loneliness, diabetes, stroke, breathing tubes, wheelchairs, and sponge baths.

Even worse, the detective on the case was Tsai Kuo-An.

Detective Tsai was the three-hundred-pound gorilla of the Central Taiwan Police. He was hard as nails and he always got his man. More

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importantly, he had friends at the National Police Agency and among the local gangs. The good, the bad, and the ugly, he knew them all. By rank, he was still only a junior detective, but police commissioners watched their mouths around Detective Tsai. In the prosecutor's office he already had a little "leave-it-to-Tsai" fan club, a bunch of clock watchers who were more than happy to hand over their responsibilities to him. "You give Tsai the hardest cases," they liked to explain, "then sign what he wants you to sign, issue the warrants he wants you to issue, and like magic, a complete case appears on your desk a week later. All you have to do is stamp it and take it to court. You have a little more time to play with your kids, take your wife out to dinner, or take someone else out to dinner. And isn't that what life's all about?"

If he got his claws into this investigation...

Wang shook his head violently. Fuck, he's only a junior detective. The law says the Prosecutor's Office leads the investigation, let's not forget that! Wang clenched his fist, his face grim. "I'll have to show them who's in charge. I'll call a meeting first thing, and take every cop on the case down a peg or two, let them know who's boss....Just give them a little taste of me, and those blockheads won't know what's hit them. I'm the one who'll solve this case, no one else. Doesn't matter if they've got three heads and six arms, if I work this case, I'll see through their dirt and secrets. The press conference afterwards is the thing. All the police standing in a line behind me, Mr. Wang of the Prosecutor's Office—Oh!"

Wang's fantasy came to its climax as he pulled up at the entrance of the Grand Candidius Hotel. One of the uniformed police came over and politely opened his door for him, but the prosecutor was a moment too slow in returning from his reverie, and tripped as he stepped out of the car. He would have made a groveling entrance to the crime scene, but he was saved by a bear-sized paw that shot out and caught him by

the head.

"Careful, now." The large hand, which seemed to grip Wang's head like a basketball, gently set him down on the ground. Wang was about to launch into a withering rebuke when he saw the insignia on the jacket in front of him. He took a step back, and his eyes met an icy stare that deflated him.

"Kuo-...Kuo-An! Thank you for your, uh, help."

"Just doing my job." Tsai's pitted face twisted into a smile which seemed only skin-deep. "Happy New Year, Prosecutor."

"Yes, happy New Year. How is the, ah, case?"

"Our station awaits your instructions, Prosecutor."

Wang straightened his suit and tie, and raised his voice. "Very good. It's good to be efficient about these things. Let's not waste time with any formalities then, lead on."

Tsai led the prosecutor through the lobby of the hotel, towards the north wing of the building. A scattering of guests sat around the lobby. They had heard rumors of a death, and now a whisper ran through them at the sight of Tsai and Wang sweeping past, comically mismatched in height.

Wang quickened his pace, drawing himself up taller and puffing out his chest. His patent leather shoes clacked on the marble floor. "You've been busy lately, I see. That investigation in town is not finished yet? The police are the right people to look into something like that, the death of a streetwalker. But this sort of affair, respectable members of society, business interests...it's best left to me. I majored in economics at university, you know. There are a lot of financial issues that you wouldn't really be able to handle. I'll make a call to your colonel and ask him to assign your best detectives. If it's just two or three of you little kittens—"

As he was still speaking, Tsai opened the door of the Second Banquet Hall. Inside was a hive of activity. A dozen police officers were bustling

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back and forth around the room, accompanied by the clacks and beeps of landlines, cell phones, keyboards, and fax machines. A whiteboard was covered in photographs, plans, and reports, and a printer was spitting out page after page of new documents.

“Two or three little kittens, you were saying, Prosecutor?” Tsai asked.

Wang gave a high-pitched chuckle. “I was... yes, my boy brought two or three little kittens home with him the other day. Look, my suit’s covered in cat fur....My goodness, what a lot of people there are here! I didn’t realize it was quite so...Should we have a little briefing, to talk about the latest progress?”

As he said it, several of the police looked up at him, the irritation plain on their faces.

“It’s only been a few hours since the crime was reported. There’s not much point in a briefing now,” Tsai said. “Everybody’s very busy, as you can see.”

“Just a small-scale meeting? What if we just asked the lead people...”

“I’ll bring you up to date, Prosecutor. Perhaps we can talk as we go?” Without waiting for an answer, Tsai called over a young uniformed cop. “Yu-Cheng, bring a copy of the file. We’re going for a walk.”

At 6:28 a.m. on Friday, January 1, 2016, the duty station received a telephone call reporting the discovery of the body of a man who may have been shot on the lakeside path behind the Grand Candidius Hotel. Local police arrived thirty minutes later, and secured the scene. Detectives and the medical examiner arrived at around 9 a.m. The victim proved to be Pai Wei-To, chairman of the board of the Grand Candidius Hotel. A bullet entry wound approximately 0.5 cm in diameter was observed on the victim’s back, to the left of the heart. Numerous minor scrapes were found on the victim’s face and hands. The victim wore a pale grey vest and black jogging pants, with sports

socks on his feet, but no shoes. Except for 25 dollars in loose change, nothing else was found on the victim’s body, which was soaking wet, with wet sand all through his hair and clothing.

The police initially believed that the cause of death was the bullet wound, but the medical examiner found otherwise. The bullet entered the victim’s body from behind, passing through the thorax, and lodging between two ribs. However, it did not damage either the heart or an artery. Foam and sand were found in the victim’s trachea, suggesting that he was submerged in water while still alive. The medical examiner believes that the victim did not die instantly when shot, but fell into the lake, struggled back out, then finally died from loss of blood. When the body was discovered, it was not yet cold, and rigor mortis had not set in, so the death most likely occurred no more than 90 minutes before, perhaps between five and five-thirty a.m.

“Lakeside path?” Wang’s face registered confusion.

“That’s right, on the path. Is there a problem?”

“Er...I don’t see a path. What path?”

The three of them were standing in the parking lot on the north side of the hotel. The end of the lot gave directly onto the cliff, and Wang was leaning up against the railing, gazing out into the sparkling blue skies. Lake Candidius was as bright as quicksilver, a shining inlay among the mountain peaks.

“The path is at the foot of the cliff, Prosecutor, sir.” The speaker was the young police officer, Lo Yu-Cheng. He stood, back perfectly straight, face a picture of earnest focus.

Wang peered downwards. Through the rocks and branches, he could just make out a thin ribbon of a walkway, almost exactly level with the surface of the lake. Suddenly someone shoved him from behind, and Wang dropped straight to the ground with screech of fear. But when he turned to address the culprit, Tsai Kuo-An was already leading the way onto the stone

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steps that descended to the lake. “There is a way down here. We can talk as we go.”

A stream of obscenities rose and died on Wang’s lips, but he suddenly caught sight of two closed-circuit security cameras on street lights alongside, one of them pointing directly at the top of the stone stairway. He allowed himself a pleased little nod, and quickened his pace to catch up with them.

The victim, Pai Wei-To, was 50 years old. Resident of Taichung, married, no children. Founded the Wei-To Construction Company at age 33, now the owner of several companies including Wei-To Construction, Grand Candidius Hotel Company, Wei-To Developments, and Lan-Hsin Construction. Business interests include both construction and hotels. Personal wealth measured in the hundreds of millions.

The Grand Candidius Hotel opened in 2009. Pai Wei-To moved the offices of all his enterprises to the second floor of the hotel building, and he himself moved into staff accommodation nearby. (Naturally, it was the kind of staff accommodation that consists three apartments knocked together into one luxury suite with a lake view.) Initial inquiries made of Pai Wei-To’s widow and hotel staff members suggest that Pai spent most of his time working, and that his habits were ordinary. He worked from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. every day, and did not appear to have enemies. Everyone seemed shocked and sorry that such a terrible thing should have happened to the chairman.

Police databases confirmed this. Beyond a few violations of zoning regulations, and an accusation of fraud that was clearly part of a business dispute, Pai had no criminal record whatsoever.

“Ha—have—have you found the murder weapon?” Wang panted. The stone steps had been cut into a natural crack in the cliff, and a handrail added for safety. They were not steep, but Wang had not slept, and his knees ached at

the best of times. The descent was an ordeal.

“No. We haven’t found the gun, or any bullet casings. Only the bullet recovered from the body.” As Tsai spoke, the young Lo Yu-Cheng slid a sheet of A4 paper out of the file and handed it to Wang. It contained photographs of the bullet from four different angles.

“6.5 millimeter semi-rimmed, produced by the Japanese during World War II.”

“A rifle?”

The two policemen turned and looked at him, a little surprised. “The kind the Japanese police used to carry. A lot of the aboriginal tribes use them as hunting rifles now. Last year we sent you a case of illegal possession involving a weapon of the same kind.”

“Oh—oh—yes. Secured a conviction on that one,” Wang panted. “So, you think this was a local? From the area around the lake?”

“Not necessarily. It could have been anyone who got hold of a gun and bullets. It’s not particularly hard. We’ll have to look into it.”

“What was Pai doing on the path so early in the morning?”

“Jogging. Hotel staff say he jogged for an hour at five o’clock every morning.”

“Jogged up and down these steps?”

“I’m sure he had strong knees.”

Just before Wang’s own knees buckled under the strain, the three of them reached the narrow walkway at the base of the cliff. It was an extension of the steps that snaked in sinuous curves between the rippling wall of rock and the misty expanse of the lake. The path was virtually level with the surface of the water, with a guardrail along the edge. It was wider and flatter than Wang had imagined. A string of LED lights ran along the rock face, one every few inches. Lo Yu-Cheng said that the lakeside path was open 24 hours a day. It was a selling point for the hotel: night time strollers could enjoy the lapping of the lake and a clear view of the Milky Way.

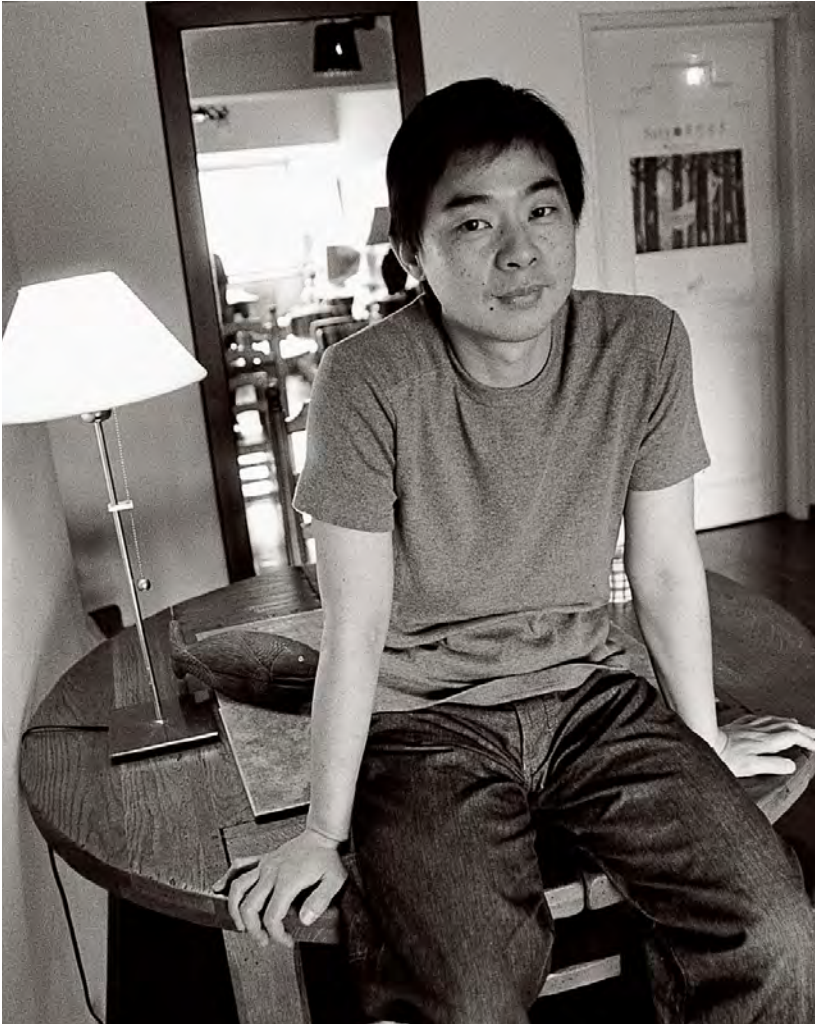


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# SO CLOSE YET SO FAR

## 忽遠忽近

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### JIMMY LIAO 幾米

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- Category: Picture Book
  - Publisher: Locus
  - Date: 12/2016
  - Rights contact:  
Grace Chang  
(Books from Taiwan)  
booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
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(approx. 1,600 words in English)
- 

Jimmy Liao is a picture book author and illustrator. He worked in advertising for twelve years before a successful battle with leukemia inspired him to embark on a new career as an illustrator. Since then, he's achieved fame throughout the Chinese-speaking world, as films, TV shows and merchandise extend the world of his stories. He has won numerous influential awards and been published in several languages, including collaborations with English-speaking writers, such as the Amazon Best Book of the Year for Kids winner *The Champion of Staying Awake*, created together with Sean Taylor.



Will they, or won't they?

In *So Close yet So Far*, famed illustrator Jimmy Liao brings a simple yet heart-wrenching story of two hands that almost touch. She and he live across the street from one another; they create, wait, and fight for one another; and as the modern world advances through turmoil and confusion, they keep one loving eye on the other. As audiences have asked about every famous couple in history: will they, or won't they?

Jimmy Liao's genius with color and line comes forth once again in *So Close yet So Far*, a full-length story of growth, solitude, disaster, and hope. The book itself a thing of beauty, something both adults and children can immerse themselves in entirely.





They played in the same park,  
pulling balloons, riding ponies, racing around and around.



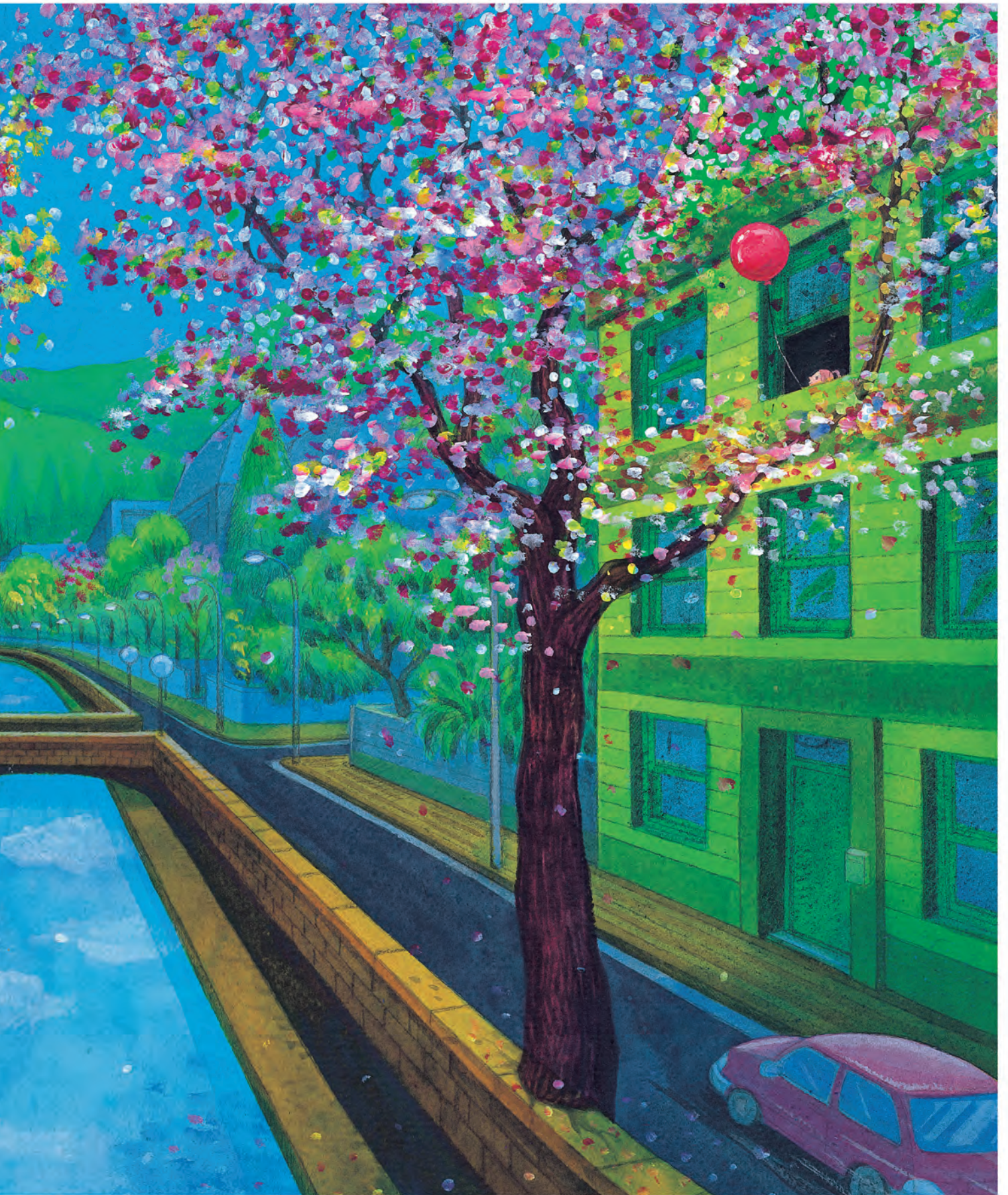


They had the same piano teacher,  
loved to play *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, hated the painting that hung on the wall.









He lived opposite her, only a seven-minute walk away.





They went to high school in different cities.  
But they missed train after train while saying goodbye.





“Do you think one day you’ll stand right in front of me and I won’t recognize you?” she said.

“That’ll be the day the world ends!” he replied.

