



利茲大學當代華語文學研究中心

**Writing Chinese**

The Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing

# Writing Hong Kong



*Photo by J Wong*

*We are delighted to present the three **winning entries** of the Bai Meigui Creative Writing Competition 2024. We are grateful to our judges: Jennifer Wong, Kit Fan and Karen Cheung.*

Overall Winning Entry

## A Braided Pulse

*By Monica Kam*

snaking through sleep. I stirred. And when the strands coagulate in my spleen,  
the way thread knots itself under a canvas, I'm tugged awake.

Back into night. Candlelight burning a hole in the black of my room.  
Its flame catching moments on my body and the needles I'd left inside.

One between my brows, gathered a frown. Another in my foot, tensed my leg  
to tiptoe. The throat stone swallowed one too.

Silver stems searching within. For light to stir shade. For shade to cover light.

We should each have only twelve pulses. I waited for mine in the cun, guan and chi,  
on the white cliffs of both wrists, hoping to find my flock of birds.

Nothing.

Then all at once, a quarrel of pulses arrived. But none were  
mine. These were rumblings of the past. Past patients. Ones who'd  
forgotten to return. They were of lingering, debris in the midst of a typhoon.  
Perhaps my birds were among them, but I could not hear even the flap of a wing.

I offered my fingers to the flame and tried again. Nothing.

People had noticed I wasn't quite right. My assistant said, you're reading from left to right. Your eye is twitching again, the unlucky one. Some beads are missing from your abacus.

Thinking back, I had left some needles in too long. A glass dome had collapsed on a patient's back, little shards swept up while he slept. A lung was once pierced too. My cheeks heated now without any mugwort cones.

I considered what I was holding. I'd grown up with needles in me, on this table, mother and father passing a cigarette between them, discussing my future. It's a braided pulse, mother had said, fingers like bamboo leaves on my wrist. She carries it all, I heard her say.

Too sensitive, father responded. I watched the shadow of his swollen head shake. She'll have to be careful all her life. My muscles stiffened but I kept silent. On the wall, a map of the body's meridians moved, as all stillness moved when eyes were young.



*Credit: Monica Kam*

My mother sat back. Her pulse was the studious turning of a book's page, my father's the bronze bell at midnight. They were both of candlelight. Of cures too.

I had decided to close the practice. I was almost sixty. Time to move on. At

close on the last day, a woman walked in. Insomnia, I knew, as soon as I saw her. My assistant tried to explain, but I told her to come through.

Her name was Zhu. When I touched her wrist, her fingers curled like shy grass, hiding the lines she'd begun in the womb. Red eyes and tongue. Her chest was tight. Said she tasted bitter melon, though she hadn't eaten any since last winter.

I found her pulses, felt another's beneath. A thought inside a conversation, the shadow of a dance. It sounded familiar. Footsteps like mine. Could they be? I hurried the thought out.

The pulse of day within night, I announced. Neither is at rest.

What I'd failed to notice. The way she'd held her belly as she scanned the photos on the wall. All the babies birthed by me, my needles moving qi and warming wombs, rearranging organs for space. It isn't my style, but it's common practice, and a blank wall frightens some.

This baby, she'd said, pointing to the oldest photo, it is me.

I let her lie down, prepared my needles, thinking of the heart and kidney disharmony I was sure to find, sure to resolve, my forehead tense with the two pulses, a different song in each ear. Then, a memory was pierced, awoken. Felt the goddess of mercy drop her vase. Felt the river spill.

Her mother's name, a breath out. Ahn. My first patient. What happened to Ahn? I heard myself asking.

When I turned around, she was gone.

That was seven months ago. I haven't slept through the night since.

Overthinking, my assistant had said when she came to visit recently. It curses the very young, and the very old. I looked at her. She was neither, but knew both well, she said. Who else cries of their own thoughts but the helpless? She pulled open my curtains.

Let some light in.

Maybe she had been right. I found my fingers in the flame again. Where were they? I wondered. Zhu, Ahn, and the rest. Did they still wander? I burnt my fingers black thinking of them.

Maybe, my assistant had said, they've just gone elsewhere for the cure.

At the foot of my building now, I heard a crowd gathering. I pinched the flame, felt the sour but comforting sting of each needle I twisted out. It was light and loss.

I leaned out the window: a sea of red candles melting in the hands of my patients. Their eyes were scaling the building. I felt faint.

Which balcony?

Which celebrity?

Which stock had fallen?

I checked my pulses. No answer. Pushed my limbs through the holes in my clothes, flicked through my files, scribbled an address on the back of an old note,

tucked it into my pocket.

When I reached ground, the crowd had disappeared and the moon was full. On the pavement, the sap of wax was cooling. Children ran towards me, their lanterns leading the way. They slowed to pass me, then started up again as they turned the corner, leaving no footprints. I pressed my fingers to the floor to prove my permanence and the wax gave way.

I trusted it enough to follow its trail, and it led me to the pier. A breeze was gathering and we waited for the captain's signal, his ear to the wind.

Only T3 tonight, he said. The last ferry still goes.

A sailor unravelled his thick plait and let us loose into the harbour. Blackwater held drops of light. Our route was up the heart meridian: a gentle curve from the smallest finger to the shoulders cave, heaving with night sweats, night terrors. Dark, smelly nook where the heat of a brawl dried laundry above, where gambles were made on the weeks wages, the dealer a fishing net, pulling in his wins with the stretch of both arms.

I climbed to the upper deck, remembering Ahn, meeting her here many years ago. The two moons of that night: the broken bits in the water, and her swollen belly, held over the railing. An offering. I'd caught them in the raise of a wave. Her laughter engulfed my scream. We sank back. I told her come sit, sit down with me.

She said she hadn't slept in months. Said she'd been looking for the other side of time. She repeated what she'd caught in the harbour: a long wig, a torn lantern,

an unopened tin of dace. She laughed to herself, reciting a long list of the baby's possible names, before, on my shoulder, abandoning solid state.

I checked her emanating pulses. They were doubled, day within night, yin with yang, growing. One pulse was taut like a tightrope, the other was gentle steps, placing one foot in front of the other. On either side a nightmare was waiting.

I'd forgotten the third moon of that night, the one that had watched from above. The same one now, that pulled the waves, turned the tides, that flicked water onto my arms to make me shiver.

I took the MTR up two lines, green and red. On the map, they traced the outlines of a lion and a dragon, heads locked in a long battle. In body, it was a brief encounter before curving separate ways. The train rushed forward. Those on benches slid like beads across an abacus, all calculations reset. Without acknowledging one another, they arranged themselves again.

On land again, crossing the road. We come together briefly like hands crossing to pray, both sides carrying a hurried pulse, excess of heat, stagnation of qi. Their edges into mine, I palpated the city this way.

Tonight, I let one crowd take me in. Down a side street, side door, some stairs. Tonight, they seemed to know something I didn't. Someone spoke old words to open a guarded door that shut heavy behind us.



Credit: Monica Kam

Inside, thick air and the thunder of mahjong tables filled the room. Plastic chips travelled up and down knuckles. I asked for a drink and was given beer and Iron Buddha tea. I sat down, looked around. Those who left the markets and stock markets for the day came here for better returns.

I looked at my opponent. Apart from the tattoos on his neck, a missing arm and a gold watch, he was once a patient of mine. His leg shook furiously. Hurry up if you're playing, he said.

He had staggered in one day with a swollen eye and an antler in his side, demanding stitches.

They're looking for me, he'd said. I owe.. I owe.. You know needles, don't you?

He'd looked me up and down, like he'd head for my neck, or cry for his mother, if he'd had the strength.



My assistant had the phone to her ear, finger over the 9. Crimson drops falling to the floor. I shook my head at her and told him to lie down.

It had been a while, but I still recognised the tiles by touch. The cuts that brought a sparrow to a branch, and made the four winds blow. Where you could pick up a tile that said 發 and have it mean nothing at all.

I watched the lump in his breast pocket, and in his cigarette pack, the extra tiles up his sleeve. His hand over them as he played, his ghost limb on my shoulder asking that I not use them.

I did what I could. We were playing big, so for some rounds no one could win. His legs shook our drinks, our seats. We didn't speak but shared sighs, and when our hands met in the middle to clean the deck, each time I felt his pulse, saying I owe, I owe. As he began to win more, and the others on the table began to complain, I noticed a cloud form around him. People were showing interest, their cigarettes ashed onto our table, their elbows resting on his shoulders.

The last game. I took a tile from the wall. Without looking I knew. My missing piece. He looked at me. I looked at our discards. Knew we were both waiting for the same one. I considered what I was holding. Slammed it down, surprised myself. The table shook, the rest of the wall fell. A toothpick out of a mouth. He grinned, a wild smile, and got up to collect, but the cloud descended on him, picked him up, telling what they were owed. His shirt lifted and I saw the path of my old stitches.

Upstairs, out the door, I tried to follow, but they were gone. No blood tracks, no trace of him. Daylight's boundaries fell into place: signs, queues, reasoning. The length of nails and the weight of money. I'd lost a lot. Felt my coins. Enough for an egg tart and the paper. I passed the printers churning out the day's words, stopped by the standstill touting yesterday's, its keeper on a wooden stool, asleep, the parasol above flapping.

I dropped some coins into his breast pocket, picked up a paper. The urgent wind tugged as I flicked through the pages. I felt another patient's arrhythmia in me, like the sound of her typing, the backspace button worn to the battery. When her fingers rested for the pulse reading, I could just about hear the words she wanted to write, the ones she would delete, and what she would choose to replace them with.

If you replace the words of a story, will it still hold some essence of the original? For a while she found ways. Read it, she said, but notice every other word. Let them tell the story. Then it was every third, every fifth. Just the first word of each paragraph, it captures what I am meaning. The stories were short, and later, it was just the byline, telling me she still existed. Now that's gone too.

Rain began to fall in heavy drops and blurred the words on the page. I raised them above me as an umbrella, and ran for the tramlines.

The grooves in the tracks shook the meat of our cheeks, our arms, the thin skin of shopping bags. I watched out the front of the tram as a cyclist slowed to wipe the rain off of her forehead, turn to see how close she was, then pick up her pace again.

We followed her to the wet market, where she got off her bike. Meat swayed under red light. Green boots stood in puddles. Carp in

styrofoam ponds, kicked occasionally to prove they still swam.

I watched the cyclist approach an old woman, take the bags from her hands, and follow her as she haggled through the market. I recognised that posture, that way of asking to be followed without a glance or a word. If only she would turn around to show me her one good eye, I would know it was her, still hunched, still standing. When we first met, her pulse was thick as drum-skin. I was the one to carry her groceries then, and her body up the stairs to my practice. Her chest soft, her pearl necklace cold on the back of my neck.

Her skin was more wrinkled than the eggs her daughter-in-law steamed, left for too long in the rice cooker, she said. Her daughter-in-law whispered in another language, and she watched her mouth move only to see its white teeth. In their small home the idea grew every night. To move to England, place of rain and uncooked vegetables, she said, good eye tilted towards the kai lan she'd bought from the market, picking out its yellow buds.

Despite all the fish eyes she steamed, she held her face in a wink. I pressed needles into her earlobe, behind the ear, where vision goes to be turned around. I'm still seeing, she said.

Though she claimed my needles were helping, over the months I saw her, her pulse thinned to a prawn's whisker, only an occasional twitch, like it was suddenly alive again on the catty scale, in the plastic bag, and sometimes even at home in the sink, ready to be fried.

Once, she left her pearl necklace on my table, and that was the last time I saw her.

I got off at the tram terminus and looked up. The rain had stopped. The next distance was up.

She'd had thick hands and nails black with dirt, reaching out to lift me up. In our grip I felt the splinters that grew in her pierce me. I followed her boot prints up the building's bamboo frame, retracing steps we'd once taken, feeling young again.

She'd come in for back pain, muscle stiffness, common in her line of work, aggravated by rainy days. Treatment was often around the hips, and the bend in her legs, places that made her shiver. She kept returning before her appointments. Some days, while I was working, she would scale the building instead of taking the stairs, and I'd find her perched outside my window. When I peered out, she would put her hard hat on me, hand over mine.

At the top, I looked down, looked for her, her hard hat, her hardened muscles, the heart. Tough as a fist. Her note was in my pocket. It used my name. It said she would have said it until I could hear it again. Over the sounds of pulses, of people, the traffic. But it was her voice too.

It said that though the rain had stopped, it continued under the tree where she was sitting. Old flowers sagged to brush her cheek. She had to get up, to wander. I moved along the pressure of her pen and the stain of a pressed flower, like tracing her spine for where I could enter. That was all gone now.

I looked ahead. From here I could see past the tallest buildings, all the way to the coast. I could see the long bridge, an umbilical cord braiding its way back to the belly. Water reached for the vehicles that dared to travel it. I turned the note over for the address I had written down. Heard the flap of wings above me. I'd been wondering for a long time now, what had happened to her.

I wove back on to the MTR, following the train line shaped like a wishbone, snapped the short end and used my toes to catch the front door as it was closing. Took the stairs to avoid neighbours, found that her door opened with a gentle push. I had done this once before.

Inside she was there, in photographs and choices: choosing to let the paint peel, to collect cities on the front of the fridge, press fallen hair onto the walls of the shower, the showerhead still dripping. In rotting mangosteen and laundry left in the drum, I could smell her. I could smell cockroach traps and stale water in a vase with dying chrysanthemums. I had done this once before, thirty years ago. Found a baby in a crib, quiet but alive. No other signs of life. No one was here now.

I looked out the window. Downstairs, a crowd had gathered, incense in one hand, red candles in the other.

Which balcony?

Which celebrity?

Which stock had fallen?

I hurried down. The crowd had stayed, thickened to a familiar quarrel, and it was the nudging, the pushing, the leaning that kept us all standing. They turned their eyes to me. My patients. For a moment, I thought this must be a nightmare, or that the nightmare might finally be over.



Credit: Monica Kam

Then a dragon's head nudged me out of the way. The crowd cheered as it moved through us: its body was a snake, with scales of a carp, talons of a bird, whiskers of a prawn, and antlers of a deer. It stopped now and then, allowing the crowd to adorn it with incense, twisting them in to make them stay, before moving on. The disharmony dispelling, the quarrel becoming a song, the qi was beginning to flow.

The wind whipped, and incense smoke flew into my eyes. I shut them and felt the burn that comes before hot tears.

T8, someone announced. We should go now.

The crowd began to rush, and with my eyes shut I let them carry me again. It seemed like we were going round and round, a circle that was shrinking to its centre until everything had become quiet. Where had they gone? Had they found

new names, new countries, new life yet.

I felt around. No one. Just the wind now, picking me up, tangling my hair, and leaving me.

I blinked a few times and began to see light, and shadow again. All in red tones. The crowd had scattered but they'd left behind their candlelight, and thick wax along a path that I followed. Above, the burnt tips of palm leaves combed the heat.

At the end of the path, Zhu was there, sitting peacefully. Around her, candles winked, the wind blew them out, and they lit up again.

In her face I saw what I had already known. That there was no cure, just continuation. I was there in her arms. Our sleepless nights shared. The baby, so new it was translucent. Curled fists, curled face. It had not yet seen a full moon.

It was stirring, shrugging off its cloak of sleep. It began to make a sound that could have been a laugh or a cry. From afar I couldn't tell. For now, just a call to join them. I considered what I was holding. The roots of a banyan tree lifted the path, and me, as I approached to find out.

**Monica Kam** is a writer and lawyer from Hong Kong. She is the winner of the 2023 Comma Press Short Fiction Prize and is a recipient of the London Library Emerging Writers Programme and Spread The Word's London Writers Award. Monica is currently completing her debut collection of short stories.

## Second Place

# Night Drive

*By Priscilla Yeung*

Hoi-Yang began to drive alone at night after he read Mieko Kawakami's book *All the Lovers in the Night* during lockdown. The protagonist developed a habit of walking around at night and eventually met her romantic interest. Hoi-Yang didn't want to meet a lover though. He just wanted to drive alone.

The lockdown was tough for everyone in the world, but it was hostile in Hong Kong. The government followed mainland China's policy, which was vacuous. They wanted to eradicate Covid instead of living with it like the rest of the world had learned to do. Zero. Nada. Sayonara. Everyone waited for miracles to happen. Hoi-Yang watched his friends living abroad travelling again, going to gigs and partying indoors and outdoors on social media, but he was still barely socialising. There was tightness in his neck, so tight that, with just one more pull, he would have been strangled to death.



Credit: Viper Ng on Unsplash

You could say he survived. At least he was still alive when the borders of Hong Kong opened again. All thanks to these night drives, so he continued.

Gas prices skyrocketed with the aftermath of the pandemic, the Russo-Ukraine war and all the chaos in the world. Hong Kong was not quite there anymore, economically, socially, everything-ly, though the crowded neon lights on the



streets might fool a tourist or two.

Hoi-Yang should save some gas money, but he needed to drive even if it was for no purpose, perhaps especially if it was for no purpose.

All the happiness happened in the night.

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During these night drives, Hoi-Yang always wore his old black Converse, cotton sweatpants and college polo shirt. The navy blue one with seven faded white letters.

He squeezed his grey Mercedes E-class saloon out of the jammed car park in the basement of his apartment building. Futuristic purple lights lit up throughout the inside of his car. The sat nav appeared on the screen. Spotify recommended a night drive playlist. AI, AI, AI. Hoi-Yang ignored all the buttons and started the car. Once on the other side of the yellow car parking gate, he was free, then maybe he would consider music, and where he would go.

He stepped on the accelerator, fuel injected into the engine like heroin to an addict and off he went. It was always around two-thirty in the morning - when even the night owls were about to sleep, and the morning go-getters were yet to wake up. That was his time, his small hours.

Tonight was no different.

The roads were empty but well-lit. The street lamps were ghostly white or pale yellow or muted orange. They were standing like an army, at equal distance apart, with a uniform outlook of thin steel bodies. They seemed solemn somehow and with a hint of superior mockery. Like trees overlooking the stupidity of human beings. Like the mind police in a George Orwell novel. Like well-dressed old people at a funeral, lamenting the mess the young dead ones had made. One after another, the

streetlamps flew by Hoi-Yang's car, casting light and shadows on his face.

Highways and overhead bridges cut through the heart of the city made of skyscrapers, stacking on top of each other like a Stan Lee comic. Hoi-Yang picked the road closest to the sky, which meant he was midway up the surrounding office buildings. The white LED lights in these offices drained the life out of a person. There were still people working away. Unlike Hoi-Yang who owned this small hour, these people were owned. There had to be a difference.

There had to be a difference because, not long ago, he was one of them and now he wasn't. He was clicking so much on the mouse that his right index finger had broken. Not the bones, but the ligament was infected and swollen his finger into a fat sausage. The nurse then said many people in suits came for the same treatment. The suits were always expensive. Their faces were always withdrawn. Every part of their body except the finger was fine, yet nothing seemed fine to her.

That sounded like zombies, where the souls had left.

Once, Hoi-Yang had been proud of his broken finger because this meant he must have been doing something right. He was making the headlines, the bonus and the big bucks. It was a job that one must break the body and mind to get to the top. It wasn't a job. It was a career. No, a calling. There had to be a difference. Now he learned that that was nothing to be proud of, and a broken body was a broken body all the same.

Hoi-Yang hissed. The past made him hiss.

The clicking became an addiction. Hoi-Yang began clicking even in his sleep. His right index finger poked the mattress. His nail scratched the bedsheet. Holes only appeared on that one spot, where he was clicking and poking. In his nightmares, he

was always trying to save the market by clicking the right buttons, but these stock indexes crashed one after another. The arrows all pointed down in blood red and there was no meaning left in his world. The nightmares ended with him falling off the 108-storey ICC building in his car. He yelled. He punched the air. He opened his eyes, and it would be two thirty in the morning. Sweat drenched. Breaths heavy.

Tonight was no different.

Hoi-Yang drove into the meandering roads that led to the centre of Hong Kong Island and climbed Shouson Hill. Dark green trees lined the two sides of the road, keeping the concrete jungle out of sight. He opened all the windows and turned the music off. Cicadas sang on this summer night but there was sporadic traffic in a distance still. Somewhere, somehow, a siren was always going. Together with his raving engine, it was a symphony.

City classic.

A warm breeze swept his face, blew his balding head and tickled his scalp. He was only thirty-two. Where did his hair go? He was good at appraising things - companies, intellectual properties, even goodwill had a price, but he didn't know whether he had taken the best deal his life could offer. Maybe he had failed his personal cost-benefit analysis. Maybe he had never done one, hence the paths he had chosen, or chosen by his family, were not quite optimal.

Click, click, click, his right index finger was doing it again. This time on the driving wheel.



*Credit: Andrew Wulf on Unsplash*

Out of the hills, the coastline appeared. Deep Water Bay - where he was born and where his parents still lived. He hadn't visited them for a while. He blamed Covid. His mum demanded a grandchild every time he visited. She had everything - a wardrobe of Chanel suits, Hermes bags, Jimmy Choos - but what she really wanted was all of those plus grandchildren. The only thing she couldn't buy.

If only love could be bought.

Hoi-Yang had considered the buying option. He even had a few relationships where he showered the eager girls with gifts. After all, Confucius had said it, 'Independence at thirty'. This included having a family of one's own. He was late already. He was thirty-two years old and without hair. These relationships never worked out.

He could say he was content now. If he had someone next to him in the passenger seat, the night drive would not be the same. He would have to drive slower, drift less and play music. Worse, he would have to make conversations. Talk, talk, talk. Click, click, click.

Sometimes the moon would accompany Hoi-Yang during these night drives, but not always, because of the clouds and the pollution. The moon was like woodfires – people didn't think about them much, but if they stumbled upon them, they couldn't stop staring at them. The moon was cold, and the fire was hot, but both had passion. Both were essential elements in worship and rituals. No wonder Natsume Soseki used the moon to translate his love for someone. 'The moon is beautiful, isn't it?' Natsume wrote.

The moon was hiding behind a thin layer of grey clouds tonight. Bright, but hazy and passionate.

There was no one Hoi-Yang wanted to share his moon with at the small hours he owned in his car. He had never met this person and that would be a matter of fate. If only such a person existed, then his life might make more sense. Then he might stop clicking at night. Ill fate.

Repulse Bay. The ugly apartment block called The Lily stood in the way. It was too big for the delicate landscape on the coast. It stumped on the hills like an elephant foot and distorted all proportions. There was nothing elegant about it. Nothing 'lily' about it. Hoi-Yang sprinted past it as fast as he could. The moon was shining on the moving tides, making the sea pearly. Cicadas' singing faded, replaced by the sound of the waves but Hoi-Yang couldn't hear it. He could only hear his raging exhaust. He drove so fast that he felt wind bashing his right ear. Maybe that was how Jackson Pollock felt before he crashed his car and died.

Don't go there. He heard his mind say.

Houses for the ultra-rich appeared. Houses in Hong Kong were a rarity, but on this coast, there were too many. The rich neighboured the rich, in a secluded world

where windows were only installed on the sides facing the sea. They didn't know anything about the real world. They lived like Barbies, in a big box with one window. Even the sides of their roads downslope towards the poor were well shielded by evergreen trees, shut garage gates and house number plates.

Hoi-Yang wondered what kind of problems they were dealing with in those Barbie mansions.

Click, click, click.

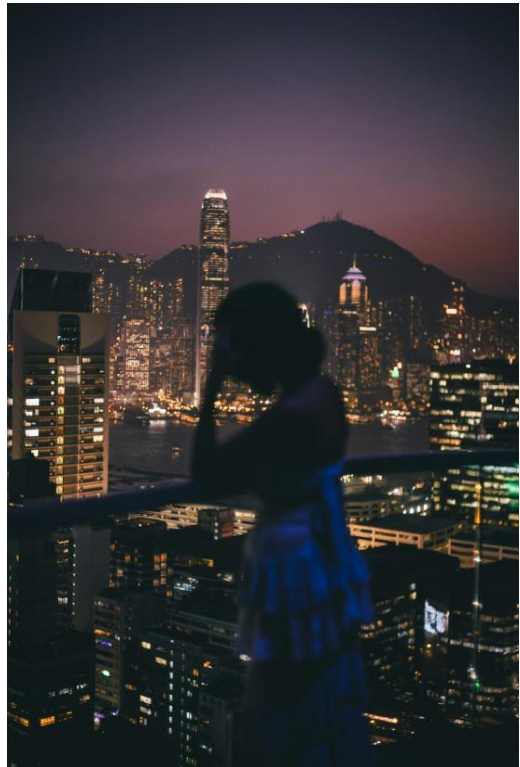
Finally, Stanley, his destination. All but a twenty-minute drive. Murray House stood there in complete darkness. Silhouettes of stone columns, Doric style, next to the Guanyin temple. A stray cat ran past. A lone piece of trash danced in the wind.

Hoi-Yang parked the car. The security guard recognised him and nodded. He walked to the Blake Pier and finally, he could hear the sound of the midnight waves. He felt the wind on his balding scalp. He smelt the cold in the sea. Streetlamps were off. He heard making out noises. Someone was fucking at the pier, maybe whispering 'The moon is beautiful tonight' in the other person's ear too, or not. Most likely not. Just fucking. The woman was moaning pretty hard, maybe getting fingered. Hoi-Yang's got a little stiff. The couple heard him walking towards the tip of the pier and went quiet. Since Hoi-Yang didn't leave, they scrambled away in teenage giggles. He wondered if the girl ever came.

If he had a girlfriend, he would finger her in a bed of rose petals. He would go down on her until she couldn't stop screaming and came all over his face. He would hold her throughout the night and spoon her sweet bottom. He would cook her breakfast pancakes with black drip coffee, and watch her eat.

\*

What Hoi-Yang really was, was that he was a romantic. A hopeless romantic. He wanted love. He wanted rom-coms. He wanted *Pride and Prejudice*. Like Mr Darcy, he saw a world full of greedy people. Coerced, indiscreet and greedy people. That was Hong Kong. They priced romance. They calculated marriage. They commodified happiness. The Hong Kong he knew was just that in a nutshell. There was no need to romanticise this city for righteousness, morality or idealism. Those years – those unspeakable years bygone – were an abnormality – a bug. Click, click, click. Gone. Back to shopping. His manic pixie dream girl would never come. No one really was Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*. Not even Jane Austen herself.



*Credit: Killian Pham on Unsplash*

This thought sucked. He didn't want his brain to go there, so he walked back to his car, waved the guard goodbye, and drove once again along the solemn street lamps. Through the coast, the ugly Lily, the ultra-rich homes, the mountains, the highways and Hoi-Yang returned to Happy Valley, where he lived.

Hissing sound.

He maneuvered around the basement carpark and squeezed his Mercedes E-class saloon into a tight spot in the corner. He took the elevator to the top floor, unlocked the metal gate, and opened the wooden door painted in melon green.

He went to his study, turned on the old-fashioned banker's lamp with the jade shade and poured himself a generous measure of whiskey. He stood in front of the

bookshelves and decided to start Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* with his nightcap. In no time at all, perhaps ten pages in, however, he fell asleep on his black lounge chair with a throw over his body, like he had been since he started driving at night after reading Mieko Kawakami's book *All the Lovers in the Night*.

This was the only place his right index finger wouldn't click.

***Priscilla Yeung** is a writer from Hong Kong, now based in London. Her work has appeared in the University of Oxford's *Torch Magazine*, the *Hong Konger*, among others. She is short-listed for the *Book Edit Prize* and long-listed for the *Creative Ink Prize*. She is writing her first novel. Find her on: [priscillayeung.com](http://priscillayeung.com) or @priscilla.writing.*



Third Place

## Sick Bed

By Gabrielle Tse



Credit: Gabrielle Tse

I wake thinking of surrender.  
A berry-soft word, all sweetship and decay,  
wetting the mouth with its succour.  
Here nothing is as soft as memory:  
pill-pink buildings and pill-pink shoes,  
tip against toe in fetal boxes.  
To sleep again I must imagine a train.  
In one carriage flickers my father,  
real and incalculably blue,  
his mind resting on nothing.  
I arc to him, as a child reaches  
for the reflection of a moon.



Credit: Brian So, instagram: @brianyls

**Gabrielle Tse** is an Edinburgh-based writer and poet. Originally from Hong Kong, she moved to Scotland to study literature. Her works can be found in places like *Propel*, *Interpret*, and *The London Magazine*. She is working on her debut pamphlet. Her website is: <https://gabriellelse.wixsite.com/mysite>.

