

# The Apostrophe

Issue 2 | Q3/2023 | MIND



*The Hong Kong Writers Circle is a member organisation for writers of all levels and of all genres.*

*On an annual basis, the Hong Kong Writers Circle publishes an anthology of short stories. In this publication, The Apostrophe, the five points of the bauhinia flower (Hong Kong's emblem) are paralleled each quarter by exactly five original pieces, each of which has a connection to Hong Kong.*

*The Apostrophe is edited by members of the Hong Kong Writers Circle.*

*Editor-in-Chief: Jan Lee*

*Art Editor: Sadie Kaye*

*Contributing Editor: Leslie Mann*

# Table of contents

It's literature all the way down <i>Editor's Note</i>	4
I Don't, Mind. <i>Poetry   Annonya Mouse</i>	8
Black Soup <i>Fiction   Simon Berry</i>	10
Burning Paper Phone Chargers <i>Poetry   Andrew Barker</i>	29
Today I Will Punch Everyone in Hong Kong in the Face <i>Poetry   Andrew Greene</i>	31
Love Letter to Grandma <i>Essay   Grace Shao</i>	35
Authors	51
Artists	53

# It's literature all the way down

Editor's Note



Where does literature come from?

As the second issue of *The Apostrophe* began to come together, this question began to arise. It is related to that other old saw, “Where do you get your ideas from?” as well as the larger, rhetorical question, “Yes, but is it art?”

The source of all literature is, above all, the human mind – our theme for this issue. Many authors say that their ideas come to them in dreams. Those can be waking dreams, or even voices that come from within, like that in one of the poems in this issue.

Stories can also be the result of deliberate, methodical brainstorming, or perhaps the pursuit of a thought experiment (“What if?”) to its terrifying endpoint. In this issue, we are publishing our first horror story, which begins with a scientific curiosity and goes down an increasingly disturbing path.

Yet literature is also created externally. Formal writing prompts, randomly intense external experiences, and amusing incidents create the color and texture that make written work entertaining, moving, and relatable. And we are people: we love to hear, and read, about other people, and their relationships with each other and ourselves. Literature also comes from culture. In this issue, a personal essay (another first) traces not only the history of a single group of relationships, but the intricacies and interdependencies between them and the author, in the context of sweeping cultural change. Meanwhile, in another extraordinary poem, a cultural phenomenon is given a personal, narrative framework and raises questions about the relationship between this world and the beyond.

The magic happens when all of these interact with each other. And sometimes this interaction creates that elusive, wonderful form: comedy. In our first comic poem, the events and pressures of the external world have spawned an explosive, hilarious fantasy, one that says as much about context as it does about the narrator and the narrator’s surroundings.

Literature takes on another dimension when it is paired with the visual arts. In this issue of *The Apostrophe*, we are lucky enough to be able to feature a range of visual interpretations of our theme, “MIND”. The photographs and paintings come from Hong Kong and around the world, and while they are not direct illustrations of the poetry, stories, and essays in this issue, they can provoke the imagination and provide an alternative interpretation of what is written.

Yet beyond all of these, literature comes to life because of the reader. At the fundamental level, the mind creates, and it does so based on external stimuli, and the work is put together in black and white on the page. But it reaches another level when it is taken into the mind of another, interpreted, absorbed, loved, or hated, laughed at or cried with, and remembered or forgotten. Although the mind of the author and the mind of the reader may meet only through a single piece of writing, they are connected in a unique way in that moment when the piece is read.

And that, authors, readers, and friends, is what we are seeking.

Jan Lee, Editor-in-Chief

，



# I Don't, Mind.

Amnonya Mouse

They keep making me  
Fear my choices and  
I tremble  
Without rationalising  
I can't even  
Fathom how to stop.  
I don't, Mind.

They keep making me  
Break things and  
Wreak havoc here  
By terrorising  
The people I love the most.  
Shouldn't I stop this?  
I don't, Mind

They keep making me  
Follow and  
I agree  
Without ever fighting  
I can't ever  
Tell them to stop.  
I don't, Mind.

They keep making me  
Do things and  
I do them  
Without realising  
My autopilot tendencies.  
Never stop.  
They don't, Mind.

They're making me  
Withhold things  
My life  
is what they're jeopardising  
But I will no longer let them control me anymore  
Because  
I mind.



# Black Soup

Simon Berry



“You see, it’s a flawed approach. Very unscientific.”

At all of five foot nothing, Associate Professor Veronica Lee was a chubby psychotic case study in the Napoleonic complex. What she lacked in height, career attainment and empathy, she more than made up for in hubris and insecurity. Her peer-reviewed paper on Heuristic Memes in Unscripted Neurological Hallucinations From a Neo-Marxist Perspective had been the most cited paper produced by her department for three years running, simply because it was so easy to tear apart. More importantly (for present purposes), she was one of those

fortunate souls who went through life unencumbered by a conscience.

At a micro level, the forty-something academic didn't like being interrupted when she was in lecture mode. Settling more comfortably into his chair, doctoral student Harold Hopper pretended to listen to stuff he'd heard from his supervisor too many times. While she talked, he wished he could take the gloves off. Harold didn't like wearing surgical gloves because the pinpricks of sweat inside the rubber had no place to go. But better to endure a little discomfort now, he thought.

“Every person who's been inside an anechoic chamber has been prepared. They've known where they were, and what to expect. They can exit when they've had enough. A handful last ... how long? Forty or fifty minutes. Others are asking or pleading to be let out within minutes. Where are the baseline samples? Until we have a statistically significant sample of people who have no idea where they are, it's a flawed experiment.”

Harold discreetly checked his email, still hoping one of the jargon-laden essays he'd whipped up using ChatGPT and submitted to peer-reviewed but seldom-read academic journals had been accepted. With no sign of a Christmas miracle, Harold put his phone away.

“You agree, don't you?”

“Now that you explain it, it seems so obvious, Professor.” It had been obvious before her unnecessary elucidation, but pandering to the ego of the woman who would decide when, if ever, he satisfied the requirements for his thesis seemed the best approach. Hoping to graduate while he was still in his twenties, Harold didn't want six years of fetching coffee, grading undergrad papers and walking Rufus to become seven. But given that each qualifying panel had concluded with Professor Lee declaring that his thesis “needed substantial revision” before he

was put forward to his viva, Harold's expectations were so low as to make alternative routes to graduation attractive.

"Tainted. Contaminated."

Her one-person audience wasn't arguing, but the Professor droned on because she was talking to herself, not the motivationally-impaired free labour with his Doc Martins propped up on the desk in the observation room. Harold found the plastic Christmas tree in the corner more inspiring than his supervisor.

"Loss of stimulants – both sound and sight. The human body has at least fifty other senses but, deprived of these two ... the body has receptors for events occurring inside it, such as a beating heart, expanding and contracting lungs, passing wind and many other movements that you're ... they're normally unaware of. Interoception is the scientific term for them. That's the collective name for all the things that no one pays any attention to. So, the question is: what happens when that's all there is?"

"You can even hear the sound of air molecules vibrating inside your ear canals, or the fluid in your ears. You did, didn't you?" She paused, this time seeking confirmation from her postgrad.

Harold nodded. He'd been one of the flawed subjects. But while Harold had lasted nearly an hour, the Professor had cited the need to remain objective in conducting her experiments, and staunchly refused to contaminate the observation of her test subjects by transposing her own experience onto their behaviour. Harold hadn't forgotten that she'd been sweating when she voiced her excuses.

"Air supply is programmed to continue until midnight, Professor," lied Harold.

She ignored him.

While Professor Lee continued blathering to herself, Harold pulled his feet off the desk and went about setting up the anechoic chamber. Being inside the six-by-five metre chamber was weird. More than that: even with the lights on it was uncomfortable. Wedge shaped baffles made of sound absorbent foam covered the walls, ceiling and floor. Of necessity, a rubber coated steel grid was suspended above the floor.

Professor Lee had followed him inside, speaking more rapidly as she entered the confines of the chamber. “Low frequency sound waves keep bouncing between the wedges, and high frequency sound waves get absorbed by the foam itself. The result? Negative decibels.”

Some silences were more awkward than others. He’d once made the mistake of channelling Alien, and saying that, “In the anechoic chamber nobody can hear you scream, including yourself.” It wasn’t true; it was only the echo that couldn’t be heard. Professor Lee hadn’t shied away from telling him he was being ridiculous – humans could only hear sounds above zero. Normal breathing was ten decibels.

The volume of her voice sounded normal, when she faced him but faded to nothing as she turned around, her words trapped and killed by the baffles. That was the beauty and purpose of the anechoic chamber – the Latin literally meant no echo. Harold thought the interior of the chamber looked like the setting for a no-holds-barred cage fight, or possibly a torture chamber from some dystopian science fiction film. Telling the professor that the baffles were like dragon’s teeth had been another mistake.

Being on the small and unmuscular side, lifting Test Subject Two alone was beyond Harold’s abilities, and the Professor was otherwise engaged. Harold dragged the unconscious man across the rubber coated grid to the centre of the chamber. Wrapping the chain around TS2’s ankle, Harold yanked on the padlock to ensure it was closed. Even encased in noise-dampening rubber,

the steel chain was an imperfection. But they couldn't have test subjects pulling the wedges off the walls, or even being aware they were in a place with walls.

While he worked, the professor explained how neurons were never completely quiet – how there was still some sensory activity going on inside the brain – so the brain would create its own reality to replace what wasn't there.

“Anechoic chambers are the quietest places on Earth, so quiet that decibels are negative,” Professor Lee kept repeating. Technically it was a hemi-anechoic chamber, a point which the Professor fully intended to gloss over when the time came to publish her findings. She'd already had Harold write the paper and then purged his name from it. Harold knew that zero decibels – 20 micro pascals – was not in fact the level at which there was no sound at all, but merely the threshold for human hearing.

“So quiet that ... pop a balloon and there's no echo. Turn around and the words of the speaker become very quiet.” She seemed unaware that she'd just demonstrated her point. It wasn't exactly a Neil Armstrong walking on the moon moment.

“Going further, we'll use the power of suggestion.” The untenured associate professor of psychology had prepared for tonight's experiment by making horror films like the Blair Witch Project, the Exorcist and Hereditary part of the undergrad syllabus. Screenings had been arranged at the campus cinema. GBP 1.00 for students on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The two scientists had waited in the van until the movie had finished, and then picked off a straggler making his way back to the student dorms.

Minimalism was the word of the day. Minimal pre-experiment trauma. No spiked drinks. No abductions at gunpoint, just a tranquiliser gun in the night. The test subject would fall asleep under the university's sparse Christmas lights, with nothing to

orientate himself to when he woke up in silent blackness. No rustling clothes. No ticking watches. No phone.

How large a sample size would they need? It wasn't one of the questions running through Harold's mind as waited for TS2 to wake up; he had another experiment in mind.

The first involuntary volunteer, dubbed Test Subject One, had fainted within a minute of regaining consciousness, so she'd been injected with a dose of flunitrazepam, had a random phone number inked on to her palm, and left in a back alley with only the cash missing from her purse. There was no chance of anyone connecting Test Subject One with the experiment. They'd had to wait until the next long weekend, which happened to be Christmas, to ensure they wouldn't be interrupted before trying again. The scientists had to be gone before 6 a.m. on Tuesday morning, leaving behind no evidence that the chamber had been used.

Harold gave the chain another yank. It was long enough to allow the test subject to stand and take, at most, half a step in any direction. Even lying stretched out on the floor he wouldn't be able to reach any of the walls. Satisfied, Harold followed the Professor out of the chamber. She was still in talking mode. It was her normal state of being, and, Harold suspected, the reason Rufus was her solitary companion.

After securing the door to the chamber, the experiment could begin. Lights off. Nothing was left to provide sensory input. Well, nearly nothing: the floor, the chain and Test Subject Two's own interoception loaded body.

From the safety of the observation room, Harold waited. There was lots of scientific equipment, and most of the bench space was cluttered with files and empty coffee cups. He was careful to leave everything exactly as they'd found it, including what looked like a gift-wrapped box of chocolates under the Christmas tree.

“Thirty point two degrees, Professor.” It was a comfortable temperature for a man entirely naked. The sensation of cold was a stimulant, and, as such, not to be tolerated. Harold checked his own notes; the Professor had her agenda, which Harold had supplemented with his own line of inquiry: are intelligent people more suggestible?

The contents of Mr Roger Millner’s wallet and pockets were laid out on the table in front of the two observers; driver’s licence, two credit cards, Student ID, ATM card, Tesco points card, keys, 46 pounds in cash, a dirty handkerchief and a receipt for one movie ticket, a salted popcorn (large), two vegan hotdogs and a coke zero (large). While the Professor was peering at the test subject’s grainy image on the monitors, Harold pocketed the 46 pounds.

Mr Millner’s phone had been turned off, and was in a bag next to the rubbish bin, along with his clothes and shoes. Whether Mr Milner would need any of them again was an unknown experimental outcome. And for that reason, as well as the need to demonstrate true scientific objectivity, Professor Lee insisted he be referred to as Test Subject Two or TS2 throughout. Even the written records of the experiment omitted his name, date of birth or other precise identifiers.

“Specs?”

“Test Subject Two. Male. Twenty-one years of age. Undergrad. Nice Tats.”

“Irrelevant! Anything else?”

“TS2 is regaining consciousness, Professor,” announced Harold, trying to head off another intellectual belittling.

“Then we can proceed.”

Professor Lee put away her crossword and her delusions of tenure, and turned her attention to the monitors. Thanks to technology, complete darkness for the human lab rat was not complete darkness for the scientists – infrared night vision cameras and thermal imaging provided dark, slightly blurry images of the interior of the chamber from both front and side. On the monitors, TS2 and the interior of the chamber were leached of colour.

“Still showing one point eight lumens, Professor.” The pinpricks of residual luminescence from the lights would be visible to TS2 when he opened his eyes.

“Damn LED bulbs.” The charge to carbon neutrality at the university was contaminating her experiment.

A groan reached the observers via the concealed microphone in the ceiling above TS2. Thanks to the baffles, almost none of the sound reverberated off the walls back to the man regaining consciousness.

“Experimental observation period commences,” said Professor Lee. She pressed a button on her laptop, starting a timer.

Time: 00:00

Lv: 1.8620 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 32.04

dB reflective: -2.36

As TS2 sat up, he must have felt the restraint. He kicked his legs out, as though trying to shake off a blanket. Rolling onto his side, he ran one hand down his left leg, to the cuff securing him to the chain.

“What the fuck? What the fuck is going ... where am I?”

He pulled at the cuff, trying to prise open the padlock. Giving up, TS2 attempted to slip it past his ankle, before feeling his way to where the chain disappeared into the rubberised grid. His actions

were accompanied by language not tolerated in what Professor Lee's estranged mother would have called polite society. Within a minute TS2 gave up and started shouting for help, to be let go, to be told what the fuck was going on, for his clothes and to let Rebecca know that it wasn't funny.

"Who's Rebecca?"

Harold shrugged rather than speculate on malevolent partners who might be attempting to reshape the power dynamic of their relationships, based on the principles of Gaslight.

"Never mind. Pleading and threatening at the same time. One or the other would be more logical."

"Perhaps he's losing it already."

Professor Lee berated her assistant for not using proper scientific language.

While TS2 might or might not have already begun his journey from reality to fabrication, his ranting monologue, liberally punctuated with f-bombs, continued uninterrupted, until his stomach decided that two vegan hotdogs, a large popcorn and a large coke zero should not be allowed to finish their journey through the digestive tract.

"Make sure you leave everything spotless when it's over," the Professor instructed the doctoral candidate.

"Yes, Professor." Harold feared that there might be worse messes to deal with, and was soon proved correct when the test subject first voided his bladder and then his bowels. Even if Harold did clean it all up, the stench of urine and faeces would be impossible to mask. In four days' time, the Engineering Department would return from their Christmas break to discover that someone had mistaken their prized scientific facility for a toilet. We can't hide this, thought Harold. Not that he cared.

On screen, the infrared and thermal images showed TS2 attempting to stand. He leaned sideways and then backwards before collapsing to the floor.

Time 06:18

Lv: 0.9622 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 64.80

dB reflective: -2.68

“Observation at 06:18 that TS2 is unable to stand is consistent with prior studies indicating loss of balance.” This was nothing new; it was well established that taking away perceptual cues such as sight and sound made it harder to balance. Standing on one leg was a lot easier with your eyes open than closed.

Now on his knees, and indifferent to the detritus expelled from his body, TS2 was looking around like a feral animal, his head swinging first one way and then the other. He turned sharply as though in response to an unseen, unheard stimulus. Trying to stand again, he tottered and fell almost as soon as he got to his feet. Back on one knee, TS2 was shaking and shivering, rubbing his head as though to relieve the pressure. Deprived of the ability to see and to hear, the sense of space around the body dissipates, leaving the occupant of the chamber with the experience of being in a pressure chamber, as the air seems to thicken. ‘Like being in a black soup,’ someone had memorably described it.

Abruptly, TS2 pivoted his body, possibly to gain leverage against a threat only he could discern. Then, he screamed and looked around, as though trying to see his own voice in the darkness.

“Interesting. He can’t hear himself scream. A voice without an echo.”

Harold wondered what it would be like to have people without shadows, and how you would go about conducting such an experiment.

On the monitors, TS2's eyes were unnaturally wide, staring at the demons created within his own mind.

Time 10:00

Lv: 0.0342 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 54.11

dB reflective: -4.32

"Commence suggestion phase," instructed Professor Lee when the clock reached ten minutes. "Ten decibels," she added unnecessarily. The same volume as normal breathing.

Harold played the pirated soundtrack from the Blair Witch Project so low as to be barely audible; a low-pitched hum. Directional speakers pushed the sound at TS2 before it could be lost in the baffles. The response was immediate.

The subject ceased his rhythmic rocking, froze and then shouted. "Who's there!?" TS2 flinched back from something unseen. Unseen, because it only existed in his imagination.

"I wonder what he thinks is in there with him?"

"Speculation is not helpful," snapped Professor Lee over the sound of TST shouting at someone or something not to kill him.

Time: 12:26

Lv: 0.0076 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 90.98

dB reflective: 1.04

TS2's moans increased in volume, becoming a full blooded scream. He spasmodically kicked at his restraint one minute, and cowered into a ball with his arms protecting his head the next. "These are all expected responses, Professor," said Harold unnecessarily.

Time: 14:11

Lv: 0.0028 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 106.12

dB reflective: 2.00

“I can hear them. Inside my head. They’re inside me. You are inside me!”

“Confirmed hallucinatory response observed at fourteen minutes, eleven seconds. People are used to hearing certain sounds. When those sounds aren’t there, they substitute others,” the Professor’s voice logged, as TS2 started slapping his ears.

Harold repeated his earlier observation. It wasn’t at all necessary, but it was a subtle way of telling her they weren’t learning anything new which, in turn, meant that her research was worthless. “Behaviour consistent with prior test subjects who reported their heart beat sounding in their heads – some say chest as well – and a high pitched hissing – ”

“That’s the spontaneous firing of auditory receptors.” Professor Lee discharged her duty as a teacher, and implied her student should shut the Hell up.

Time: 18:23

Lv: 0.0009 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 59.37

dB reflective: -2.14

Harold watched TS2 scabbling at the floor, scraping off the rubber and stuffing it into his ears, his nostrils, his mouth. He gagged and retched, and then started the process all over again.

For the second time, Professor Lee told her flunky to clean up properly. “And make sure you replace the rubber.”

Having no idea where to obtain rubber coating, nor how to apply it to steel, Harold didn’t reply. The place would stink no matter how hard he scrubbed and mopped up the vomit and excreta, so why bother? Rigging the security cameras to show a loop of nothing happening wouldn’t remove the stench – as soon as they returned to campus on Tuesday morning, the Engineering

Department would know someone had been here, and something unpleasant had happened.

Time: 24:16

Lv: 0.0051 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 44.07

dB reflective: -3.26

“Fascinating,” breathed Professor Lee. “Subject is exhibiting primate-level response to stress.” Specifically, TS2 was scooping his shit and vomit up with his hands and flinging it into the surrounding darkness. A lot of it had dripped through the grid onto the baffles below, but there was enough left to decorate the walls with. Due to post-experimental cleansing duties, doctoral candidate Harold Hopper was less enthusiastic than Professor Lee about his development. Indifferent to his own remaining excreta, TS2 collapsed into a foetal position, with his arms wrapped around his head. As his body went limp, TS2’s quiet whimpering carried to the observers.

“Experiment concludes at 26:49,” said Professor Lee.

Harold wasn’t impressed. He’d gone for nearly an hour. Then again, he’d cheated, taking a sedative before stepping into the chamber and, unlike TS2, he’d known exactly where he was. He wondered how long a neurological psychologist would last inside the chamber.

“What about measuring heart rate and blood pressure, Professor?”

“Follow the protocol.”

Harold glanced at his watch, a quarter to eleven, and then reached for the tranquiliser gun. His meeting with the qualifying panel was scheduled for Tuesday morning. It would go much better if his supervisor failed to put in an appearance.

If he “followed the protocol”, it would take Harold at least three hours to dump Mr Millner, naked and insane, in the snow at Stonehenge and get rid of the stolen van. Then, he was supposed to come back and sanitise the chamber before Tuesday morning. But that would mean missing Christmas lunch with his gran.

When they opened the door, the reek in the chamber was like the portaloos he’d queued for before the start of the London Marathon.

“You’ll need air freshener,” instructed Professor Lee, already turning to flee both the revolting mess and the confines of the chamber. She found her egress blocked by her assistant. Giving Professor Lee a shove, Harold swung the door shut and then locked it.

When he got back to the observation room, she was screaming to be let out – telling him that he would have him placed under exclusion if he didn’t, that she’d make sure he never passed his viva, and wouldn’t get the citation credits she had no intention of giving him anyway.

Inside the anechoic chamber he could see Professor Lee’s chest heaving. “I’ll call the police on you,” she sneered. From the observation room, Harold was amused that the Professor preferred the prospect of doing time for kidnapping and torture to spending a long weekend inside the chamber. He could see droplets of sweat forming on her forehead already.

“Protocol has been followed,” he told her through the microphone.

Her hands dropped to her hip pockets, frantically scrabbling around inside them for what wasn’t there. On the monitor, Harold could see the Professor swallowing convulsively, her eyes popping, as she realised Harold had lifted her phone when he’d shoved her. Not that there was any reception inside the

chamber. Turning, she wheeled and bolted for the door, tripping over TS2's limp body.

"It's all in the mind, Professor. Nothing is real except the quietness and the darkness. Everything else is in the mind. Beginning observation of Test Subject Three," said Harold. He turned the microphone off and the lights out.

Time: 00:00

Lv: 3.419 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 86.22

dB reflective: 1.04

Relying on the infrared cameras, he had to imagine the blood draining from TS3's face. She made it to the baffles and scabbled around, trying and failing to find the door handle in the darkness. Groping her way along the wall, in the wrong direction, it was a matter of minutes before she started looking over her shoulder.

Harold spared TS3 a glance while he went about removing all traces of both himself and his professor from the observation room. Alternately running her fingers through her hair and tugging out clumps of it by the roots, she had shifted from threats to pleading. "This is murder! I'll suffocate when the air supply shuts off!" The hitch in her voice betrayed her uneven breathing. She glared at the camera, and Harold couldn't figure out whether the expression on her face was one of terror or hate. He could also have told her that she wouldn't, because he'd fixed it to run all the way through the long weekend. But the more terrified she was, the better.

"I'm claustrophobic!" she shouted, sticking her hands under her armpits, as though to protect them from the cold. Harold first made a note in the experiment's log and then checked that the temperature had not dropped below the tropical thirty degrees the Professor had deemed optimal for the experiment. It was a pity he couldn't tell if she was sweating.

Hoping he wouldn't miss anything, the diligent researcher stepped away from the monitors to check out the fridge. When he got back, a can of Boddingtons in hand, TS3 was cowering next to the foam wedges and kneading her temples. All of a sudden she scrambled away from the baffles on her hands and knees.

Harold knew from his research what she was experiencing: absent sight and sound, there was almost nothing to anchor the mind to the here and now of its surroundings. Not quite nothing – gravity, the floor and a healthy dose of scepticism might provide a defence for a while, but those defences would crumble. Would a well-educated expert in sensory deprivation be able to keep the ramparts up for four days? He popped the tab.

Goosebumps couldn't be made out, but he assumed from the way she was rubbing her arms that they were there. Her threats got louder and louder as the seconds ticked away. She could hear the fsssh, fsssh, fsssh of blood pulsing through her brain. That's all it was, she would be telling herself; just my blood. But there was something else ... there ... in the corner of her eye, a patch of not-quite black against the absolute darkness. She stared at one particular point in the black soup, a point that was no different from the rest of the blackness.

How many times had she lectured him on the nature of the active brain and its inability to slow down? How the neurons would keep firing, trying to fabricate a reality without the usual sensory inputs. How the brain would eventually substitute a fictional reality for the one it couldn't detect.

The TS2 test had run for 26:41. TS3 was a qualified neurological psychologist who'd made a study of anechoic chambers. She was also claustrophobic, a condition which would amplify the effects of sensory deprivation. The absence of sound reverbing in her ears would suggest the absence of space around her and the feeling of compression would set in.

Harold added to his notes.

Time: 18:23

Lv: 0.0362 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 74.16

dB reflective: -2.98

TS3 was blubbering, begging and threatening. It also appeared to be taking her more and more effort to talk. Harold chugged half the can, and noted that the dispassionate expert on human response to stress was exhibiting the same inconsistencies as TS2.

“At 18: 23, TS3’s speech is losing coherency,” recorded Harold.

Crawling around, she recoiled as she came into contact with TS2, who was still showing no sign of regaining consciousness. Punching and kicking TS2 (it was hard to make out, as her voice was so slurred), but Harold thought she was telling Mr Millner that it was all his fault.

Time: 21:40

Lv: 0.0362 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

dB source: 92.43

dB reflective: -0.84

Stuffing the empty can in his backpack, Harold left the observation room. He put Mr Millner’s phone, wallet (contents except the cash returned) and keys in Professor Lee’s handbag, and draped the man’s clothes over the chair in the corridor outside the chamber door. When Harold came back to pack up his laptop, Professor Lee was burrowing under TS2’s naked body.

Time: 26:05

Lv: 0.0362 cd/m<sup>2</sup>

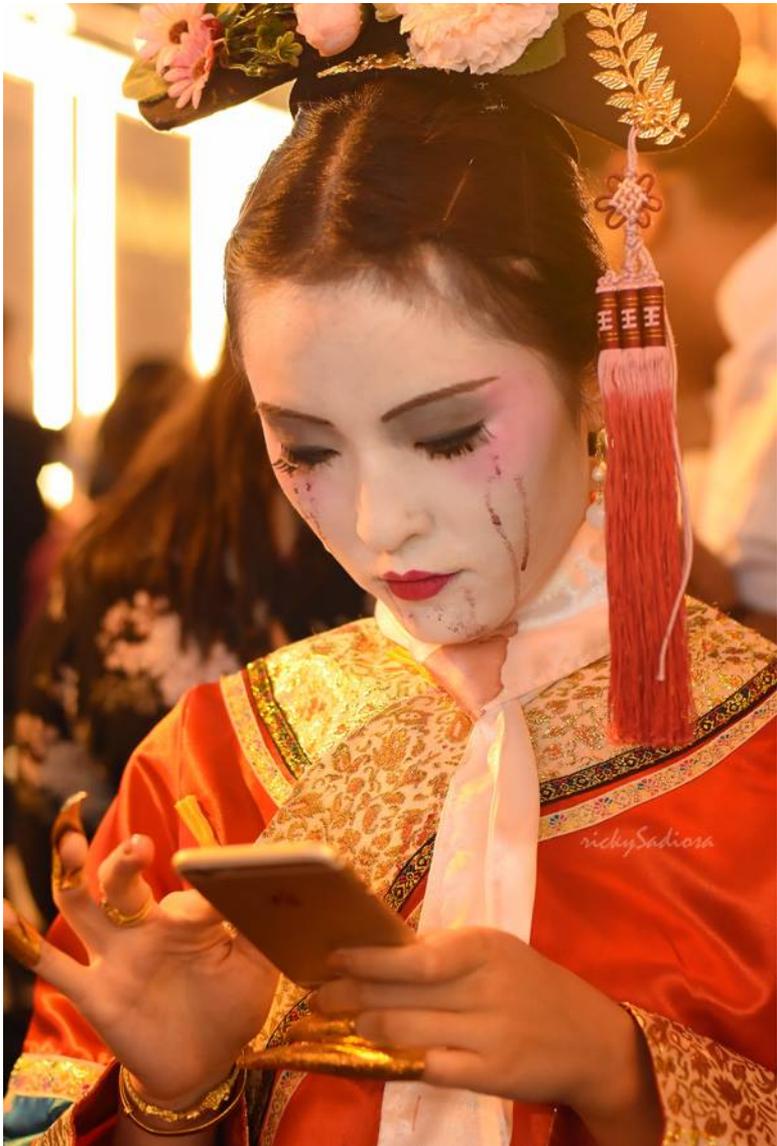
dB source: 61.94

dB reflective: -0.26

Professor Lee would have the demons of her own mind and TS2 to keep her company, until the Engineering Department returned from the long weekend. Although tempted to stay and see what happened when or if TS2 regained consciousness, Harold gave priority to partaking of his gran's Christmas turkey. He would also enjoy the prospect of facing his qualifying panel without the spectre of his supervisor derailing his academic progress again. Best of all, someone else would have the joy of cleaning up the mess left by two lovers who'd accidentally locked themselves in an anechoic chamber over the Christmas break.

As the future Dr Hopper walked through the snow, he tried to remember how long a person could survive without water.

,



# Burning Paper Phone Chargers

Andrew Barker

*Note: According to Sunset Survivors by Lindsay Varty, the most requested burnt offering for ancestors is no longer a mobile device, but a mobile device recharger.*

---

Back when devices still were known as phones  
We'd mostly find red money taking shape.  
It started out as fire and then it formed  
As paper, in the altars we would make

As soon as we arrived. The funds were loaned,  
And when the money came we paid them back;  
Though interest was oppressive, we assumed  
With world and time enough we'd work to crack

The system, build on what was being sent;  
And when our loved ones met with us again,  
They'd home to rich, successful immigrants.  
For life and death are really quite the same.

But then they sent us beds, cars, favourite foods,  
Umbrellas, cigarettes and alcohol,  
Then check-books, credit cards we couldn't use  
And then they sent us mobile phones with all

The problems that created! Batteries  
Became worth more than petrol. (Think it through!)  
What's hard to make and burn in effigy  
Has greater worth, and petrol's hard to do.

But then they got creative back on Earth,  
(Though clouds were still clogged-up with rusting cars),  
Communication, much like as in Life,  
Depends on a device that can recharge

Efficiently! And those of us so blessed  
With wise descendants, those who worked this out,  
Became the power-brokers. We possessed  
The means to soon monopolise the spout

Of gifts made to the Ancestors. Now we  
Control, collect and warehouse, distribute  
Whatever might arrive, and we decree  
The tithes the ghostly poor must contribute

To us for regulation. Without us  
So much that's passed this way would go to waste,  
And who would pay for temples we construct  
To pray for what we find beyond this place?

That next life, that comes after afterlife  
We enter through our wealth-shown proof of worth.

,

# Today I Will Punch Everyone In Hong Kong In The Face

Andrew Greene



For those of you who are still confused  
allow me to clarify:  
If you are in Hong Kong  
I will punch you in the face.

The punching will begin  
with no specific order  
it will be  
organic in nature  
it will include  
everyone.

I will be punching those  
who play video games  
loudly  
on the MTR. I tried to let you off  
with stern looks and  
dramatically offered headphones  
but you did not take the cue.

The punches will be in the face.

A large proportion will be receiving  
punches to the face  
for lack of oral care  
and overall hygiene. Blackened teeth,  
sour and ashtray breath  
are examples of punishable offenses.  
Also fingers in the nose.  
Knuckle deep or a hooked thumb rubbing.  
Or twisting tissues  
to insert two inches into the nose  
and after close inspection  
dropping them  
to the subway floor  
as easily as shed skin.

Are your children running and screaming  
in a lobby or on a train? Or are you feeding  
a two-year-old Coca-Cola? Granting their demand for a candy  
from your purse  
only to make another demand  
of your open hand  
to spit the candy into  
ten seconds later?

You all get a punch in the face.  
Why not slide into the empty seat  
when I approach  
inside the crowded bus?  
While I slide past your angled legs  
I will be punching you in the face.

The air is fouled with your smoke  
the land fills with your wasted food  
and the sea chokes on your plastic  
mentality  
of disposability.  
For these crimes you will be sentenced  
to one punch in the face.

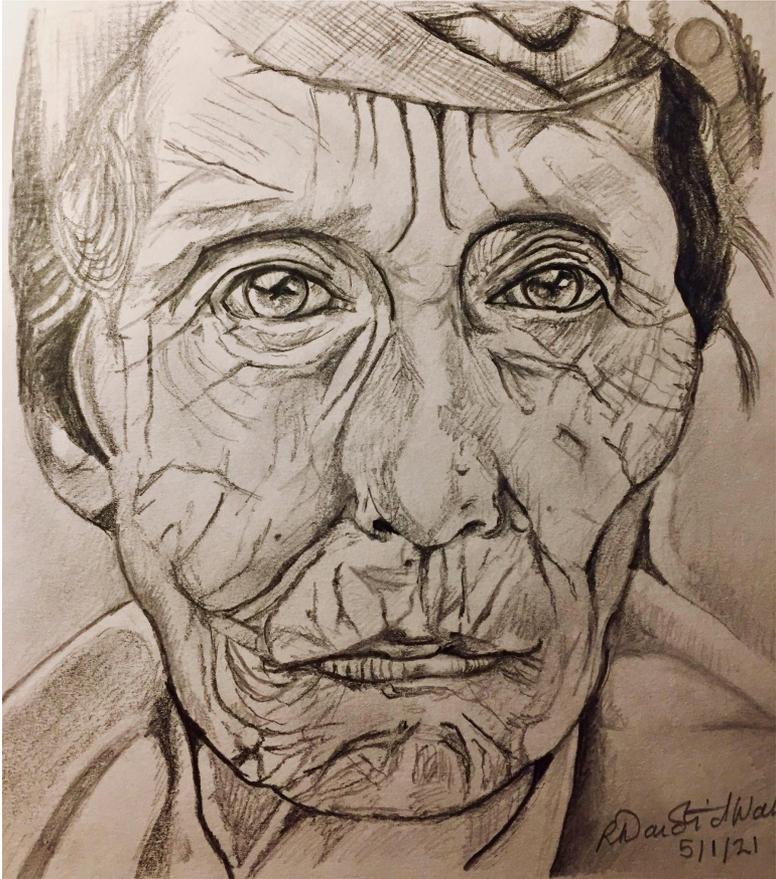
And for those of you  
who are no doubt  
shouting

“Wait! You are guilty too!  
Bitching and moaning  
and complaining! Who are you to judge?”

I am the man  
who has just punched  
everyone in Hong Kong  
in the face.

,





# Love Letter to Grandma

*The Doctor, Entrepreneur, Philanthropist, Cancer Survivor,  
and Misogynist*

Grace Shao

## **Chapter 1 – Grandma**

The birth of her first great-grandchild brought immense joy, and it seemed to have taken away any bitterness left from last Chinese New Year. After not being able to visit my grandmother for three years because of the pandemic, I was elated to spend time with her. However, my planned four-day visit had to be cut short due to a very heated vocal confrontation that broke out between me and my then 88-year-old grandma.

Before you judge, I must tell you what led to the encounter. The heated exchange occurred after my grandmother started incessantly ranting about her son deserving everything and my mother, nothing. She then made unfair comments about my mother's filial duties, claiming that she was no longer “a good daughter” because she was no longer obedient like she was when she was a teenager.

I had heard these comments thousands of times before, but for the first time ever, I raised my voice and decided to stand up to the family tyrant.

My family has always joked that we're a matriarchal family. We're loud, social, assertive, and, some would say, aggressive, and when it came to grandma, mom and I always showed her the utmost respect.

Grandma, by all measures, was the big boss.

She was born in the thirties in Hunan province, an industrial province in China and home to Mao Zedong. She lived through the land reformation, the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Great Famine, the Cultural Revolution, and the economic reform and opening up. For anyone familiar with modern Chinese history, it's safe to say that the last century or so has been one of the most volatile and disruptive times for the country.

The Wang family was very well connected and respected locally. From an early age, the siblings were taught literature, how to waltz, Russian and to play musical instruments.

Grandma's father graduated from one of the country's best universities, Wuhan University, and studied English. Her aunt often accompanied Zhang Xueliang, the prominent Chinese military leader, to grand dances. Grandmother's mother graduated from the same university that Mao attended, and was best friends with the late Chairman's niece.

When grandma was little, a servant carried her on her back to a private school. Back then, not many people were educated, let alone women and girls. At that time, only 0.1% of people in China attended university. Because of this upbringing, she loved to read, and was fortunate enough to attend one of China's top medical universities, where she met my grandpa.

Even though grandma grew up with such privilege, she seemed to have an inferiority complex. She was always told that she was second to her brother, the heir to the Wang family, who went on to have three daughters and cursed his wife for not delivering a princeling.

In the 1940s, 土改 (Land Reform) was introduced, a mass movement led by Mao that redistributed land to peasants, denounced and punished landlords, and promoted socialist transformation. Under the land reform policy, landlords were forced to hand over their properties. That's when her family fled

their three-story mansion. Soon after, everything they owned was taken by previous servants. Every aspect of the entitled life they knew was turned upside down. During that period, the previously privileged and respected squires were treated as “过街老鼠，人人喊打,”: rats that everyone threatened and chased down to beat.

Grandma and her elder brother were able to finish their education before the family tragedy hit, and went on to become a doctor and a professor of engineering. Their younger sister never finished university, and was sent to the far west countryside, as part of a nationwide initiative introduced in the 50s called “上山下乡” (Down to the Countryside Movement) that sent privileged urban youth to mountainous areas or farming villages for reeducation.

What was left with the siblings was their perseverance, desire to do good, and an outdated belief that sons were better than daughters.



## Chapter 2 – Unfairness

After graduation, my grandparents moved to Hebei province in northern China, a few hours away from Beijing, simply due to the fact that growing up in the south, they had never seen snow before and wanted to experience it. Shortly after, my uncle and mother were born.

For more than 40 years, my grandpa worked as a neurosurgeon at the provincial hospital while my grandma specialised in cardiovascular disease. During that time, their life was predictable, with the government providing food vouchers, capped salaries, and free education.

Grandma keeps a blog on Jinritoutiao, an app created by Bytedance, the parent company of TikTok, where she writes about health and wellness, medical findings, and sometimes her personal life. Over the years, this 90-year-old blogger has published more than 350 articles and amassed more than a thousand followers. In one of her entries, she posted a picture of my uncle and mother standing in front of their grandmother holding a chicken, captioned “The thoughts evoked by a photo from 50 years ago.” Grandma wrote that she lived in a small two-room apartment that had no doors. On the street where she lived, there were ten such flats in a row, with a public toilet at the end of the road. For cooking and heating, they used a coal stove. Every household had to collect water with a bucket and store it in a tank for daily use. There were no TVs or telephones; they would simply enjoy each other’s company.

In the backyard of their humble two-bedroom brickhouse, the family cultivated grape vines and raised chickens. While the family was not impoverished, they were definitely not living in abundance. Eggs and meat were reserved for special occasions, and mother never owned a piece of her own clothing until she was in her teens, mostly wearing uncle’s hand-me-downs growing up.

Grandma rarely talks about that period of her life, but I get the impression that she was the happiest then.

In her late forties, my grandma decided to jump out of that comfort zone and open her own medical practice. Lacking institutional backing, she couldn't convince people in the city to come see her, so she travelled tens of miles to visit patients in the neighbouring mountain villages, who had very few medical options.

She would bike into towns and small communities, or sometimes catch a ride with trucks hauling building materials into the villages. Despite the distance and lack of transportation, grandma did this every day for years. A trained cardiovascular disease specialist, she treated all kinds of ailments, including constipation, migraines, and menstrual irregularity, and even performed the duties of a midwife. Very quickly she gained recognition and trust, and built a reputation for being attentive, diligent and effective. Patients started travelling far and wide for treatment and she was able to take over a clinic in a village called Yangzhuang, and turned it into a temporary hospital.

In the beginning, the equipment was very limited. She and her team only had a few microscopes, some shelves and a cart. They treated patients in the local auditorium halls with bamboo sticks and sheets pinned to the floor to separate the beds.

From those humble beginnings, my grandma's practice developed into China's first privately operated hospital chain. In her early days of entrepreneurship, she conducted countless medical experiments until finally, grandma developed several series of drugs that effectively treated various cerebrovascular diseases with a success rate of more than 95% -- an achievement that changed her life.

Her clinic grew into a hospital which then soon expanded to other cities, including the capital of Beijing. By the time I was in my teens, I recall it developed into a medical chain that at one point included a pharmaceutical factory and 56 affiliate hospitals. Thousands of lives were saved, new heart disease medicines were created, all thanks to grandma.

Grandma never cared much for luxury or glamour, and she never learned to manage a business properly. Over the years, the affiliates spun off on their own, and she gifted shares to loyal partners. Mostly, she gave the majority of the business to my uncle. She now only manages the first hospital she founded and goes in daily to check on patients. She still lives in a small 2-bedroom apartment today because it is the closest compound to her hospital.

Over the past four decades, she has built schools, wells, clinics and temples and churches in underdeveloped areas of northern China. She also took in 80 kids affected by the devastating 2008 Sichuan earthquake, sheltering them while their homes were being rebuilt.

For someone who grew up in communist China, she had an interesting fascination with religion. She never actively committed to one, and claims to have read the Bible, as well as the Quran, cover to cover, and continues to pray to Buddha every morning. Influenced by religion or not, Grandma was devoted to giving back to society. Outside the home, she was a saint.

### Chapter 3 – Reconciliation

I didn't speak to grandma for nearly a year after the altercation. But as my due date approached, I wanted to share my joy and anticipation with her. Still hurt, I dialled her number. I was prepared for her dismissiveness, but I've also become numb as this same conflict has been an ongoing occurrence over the years between grandma and mom. I knew it secondhand all too well.

“Hi, Grandma, how are you?”

“So, you've called. I'm well. Have you talked to your mom?”

“I just spoke to her yesterday. What's up?”

“She hasn't come see me in two days again, she's ungrateful and she needs to know that her mother is more important than anything else.”

“Yes grandma, of course. But it's a four hour drive each way from Beijing. She just went to see you, and dad needed her to go with him to the hospital for a checkup this week.”

“Ungrateful. This is why daughters can't do anything right.”

Silence from my end; I held my tongue, as I knew there was very little I could do to change the mind of a 90-year-old lady. I wanted to tell her about how my daughter was kicking more.

“Okay, grandma, glad to hear you're in good health. Speak to you soon.”

Over the thirty years of my life, it seemed like my mother was always striving for an unattainable goal – pleasing her mother.

Mom and Dad moved to Canada in the early 1990s as part of a wave of Chinese professionals who were sent to set up overseas offices for state-owned conglomerates. Mom was told from day one that her mother's business would be inherited by her brother,

and she would not be involved in any managerial or financial way. She never wanted to put up a fight, and was content with what she had achieved on her own. So, our family immigrated to Canada, and did our best to assimilate.

More than a decade after we moved halfway across the world, grandma called one day. She threatened and scolded mom for not putting the family business first, and demanded that she immediately drop everything and move back to China.

I was only 15, and my brother was 8. My grandmother guilt-tripped my mother, and told her to leave us in Canada. China was going through another wave of regulatory changes on private-owned enterprises, and the hospital she founded was at the risk of a full government takeover.

Grandma told her daughter that all kids grow up and will eventually leave her, and even husbands are replaceable, but she had to be loyal to her mother, and the family business comes first. Mom didn't seem to notice the contradictions in her statement.

Conflicted, my mother shut down her own business, and flew across the world, back to her mother's side. She didn't bring my brother and me, because she wanted to wait to know for sure if a permanent move was feasible for the family. Or maybe she knew there was a risk that things would fall through.

When she arrived to help, her mother appointed her brother the CEO of the pharmaceutical group, and gave him millions in cash and equity of the hospital chain my grandmother built. She told my mother she was there to help the family, and she shouldn't be greedy. She was given a salary of USD300/month, which was less than one-tenth of mom's normal income. My father, working in his junior corporate job, could hardly afford our simple lifestyle in Canada. Mom was again conflicted, but she didn't want to let her mom down. So instead, our family changed our lifestyle. I still vividly remember suddenly having to go to the

supermarket at 8 p.m. daily with my dad and brother to buy bread and pre-made goods at an 80% markdown.

After six months, as all the legal battles on the business were settled, mom came home with tears in her eyes. She had successfully helped grandma preserve her legacy, but mom's own business in Canada, that had taken years to build, was in ruins. I felt a stinging sourness in my throat, ten years later, as I learned about these details. I couldn't have imagined the feeling of being so disposable, and being taken for granted by my own family.

It was then I realised how hard my mother had been trying to shield me from all this injustice, and that my mother does not get the same kind of love she has for me from her mother.

Grandpa divorced my grandmother after 40 years of marriage. Apparently, he never became comfortable with grandma's success. Supposedly, he thought he was the better doctor, and therefore he should have started his own business and been successful, not her.

Supposedly, grandma became more unhinged about worshipping her son, to a point where no rationale or logic could get through her. All she knew was that she had to get rid of anyone and everyone that could potentially claim a cent of her son's entitlement.

Grandma is oddly proud of how she handled the divorce. Once, she told me that on the day she was served her divorce papers, she thanked the lawyer, smiled politely, closed the door and went back to work. She said she has never cried about it. I guess she thinks this shows that she's tough. Maybe she saw crying as feminine and weak, and those traits as one identity. So she made sure in everything she did that she was neither.

Eventually my uncle took over the majority of the business, and distanced himself from grandma. He put everything he could get his hands on under his name. My mother moved back to Beijing almost ten years ago to help with what remains, and continues to visit grandma bi-weekly out of duty, but is regularly insulted: "A married daughter is like water poured out of a bucket," meaning she's no longer her family.

But Mom always finds the best in every situation. She took on the opportunity and enrolled herself in a Master's in Hospital Management at an Australian Medical School. She took courses, and expanded her network through weekend sessions at Peking University. She even finished her master's thesis the same week I finished mine.

And despite all the effort, the success and even results Mom has shown, sometimes grandma would still call me in the middle of my night, to tell me about how my mother should always put her and her family business first, and that her affection towards me or my brother are signs of her weakness and lack of loyalty to her.

Containing my resentment only became harder and harder. And the realisation that it is her loneliness and pain driving this behaviour only makes my heart ache more. After all, she spent most nights alone with her books.

In a culture where the child is born and is considered the possession of the parents, and it is their duty to make them proud, I thought mom had already done everything. In my eyes, my mother always put her mother first, and maybe that's because she was always trying to prove her loyalty.

## Chapter 4 – Survivor

Grandma, now 90 years old, still appears as 86 on her ID card, as she paid a local agency to alter her age. To maintain her youthful appearance, she wears bright fuchsia lipstick and a corset, dyes her hair jet black, and I'm pretty sure she's sought out Botox behind our backs.

Every summer since I could remember, we would pack up and travel from Canada to China, to stay with my grandma for the summer holiday. Every morning of those scorching summer days, my grandma would wake me up at 6 a.m., to accompany her to work.

“Grace, hurry now. Get dressed. Pack your Chinese textbook quickly.” Grandma would shout my name to wake me up, as she did every summer morning before she left for work before sunrise.

She would put on her pink suit, and then ask ten-year-old me to quickly get dressed. We'd arrive at the hospital, and people would swarm her with briefs and updates while I tagged along, thinking I was the second most important person in the room.

I made myself the office manager, and would sit at a computer, log into my Neopets account and pretend to be busy until my Chinese tutor arrived each day. That class was followed by hip hop dance lessons, held in a meeting room down the hall.

My grandma was my idol, and I emulated her every move. She would take me to fast food restaurants where my mother wouldn't let me eat, bought me pretty dresses that were way too extravagant for a ten-year-old, and even had a driver chauffeur me around the city and buy me popsicles on demand. On weekends, she would take me to local hospices or old homes, to distribute blankets and coats to help the elderly prepare for winter. When I was older, she arranged for me to teach English to rural village children at the schools she donated and built.

I never thought it was weird to spend summers in a hospital. Walking by elderly people with tubes and IV drips attached to them didn't faze me, nor did it strike me as odd at that time that my daily meals were eaten in the hospital cafeteria with people seven or eight times my age in medical gowns.

Grandma was a patient, too. In fact, she beat cancer twice. After two c-sections, she discovered she had a tumour in her uterus, so she had to have it removed.

When I was 11, she found out she had colon cancer. Of course, mom came to the rescue. Mom sat by her side day and night, through every single surgery. Mom donated her blood to grandma, every single time to the maximum allowable limit. Mom even passed out by grandma's bed due to over-exhaustion and dehydration, after she had too much blood withdrawn. Dad carried grandma in and out of bed. I wiped her face, and brought her the puke bucket.

Even during the gravest of times, grandma wasn't going to admit defeat to anyone. She took matters into her own hands.

To beat cancer, grandma underwent four operations and had major chunks of her intestine removed. She now no longer eats meat, and diligently follows a diet plan she devised herself.

Grandma often quotes a saying from Confucius, “没有生而知之, 只有学而知之,” which translates to “No man is born wise; he is wise through learning”.

There were days when she told mother that she didn't think she would make it but whenever she was having a good day, she would ferociously read whatever she could on how to overcome this demon.

She would research ways to battle cancer, and found holistic ways to supplement her medical treatments and promote her gut health. Upon recovery, she wanted to share her findings. So she published academic papers, articles and blog posts, and went on national TV to share her findings and treatments that worked for her.



## Chapter 5 – Motherhood

“She’s just like me with a big forehead,” said grandma about Isabelle. “She’ll be smart, no, brilliant, like me.”

My daughter is three months old today, and I just sent my grandma a series of pictures of me and Isabelle. Issy, as we call her, was born at the end of the Year of the Tiger, a little Sagittarius with a feisty personality. You can tell, even at only three months old, she’s just like her mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. She knows exactly what she wants.

I chuckled. “Yes, grandma, she’ll be smart, just like you.”

I think when Issy meets her taitai (great grandmother in Mandarin), I will tell her about all the goodness taitai has brought to this world. And hope that like me, Issy will grow to admire taitai’s strong will and determination. And maybe, just as my mother protected me, I will shield Issy from the pain and confusion that my grandmother has inflicted on my mother, and therefore me.

As I start embracing my own role as a mother, I truly see that we all have flaws. But in the eyes of our children, for a short period of time, we are all they know, and all that is good. And this has helped me answer a question I’ve repeatedly asked myself: why does mom keep going back?

My mother has heard her whole life that she’s less worthy. So she’s spent her entire existence trying to prove to her mother that she is worthy and loyal. I’ve accepted that for her, to find peace means pleasing my grandma. I’ve also come to accept that my grandmother’s flawed values are a reflection of her time, passed down from her own parents.

For the first 15 years of my life, my grandma was the person I aspired to become. It wasn’t until I moved to Beijing to work in my twenties that I began to delve deeper into the country’s

tumultuous history. Only then did I realise what an incredible person grandma must be to achieve all that she has. And only through that deeper understanding of the culture and history was I able to find the maturity within me to respect her, and appreciate the traces of history within her.

Putting differences aside, I can only hope that I have achieved even a tenth of her tenacity, curiosity, perseverance and dedication to society. I continue to be in awe of grandma's dedication to society, her commitment to self-growth and I bask in her sweetness when she sends me heart stickers, and her childlike innocence when she squirms with joy when I send her Japanese matcha treats. This incredible woman, against all odds, built an empire, saved lives, and influenced who I am today greatly.

Grandma often sends me her blog posts on WeChat, but I'm usually too impatient to read them. During maternity leave, I decided to finally read it through. I was surprised to find an article, hidden between a piece on gut health and the importance of deep breaths, titled "Three generations will always continue to learn and move forward with the times." The article follows her own path in medicine and her continued self-learning in the field. It details my mother's training as an engineer, how she established herself in the business world, and then taught herself how to manage a hospital. It finally goes into about my journey from finance to journalism, my journey to Hong Kong, and my drive, inherited from her, to keep pushing myself to be better.

It shook me.

Grandma is proud of us, and she sees us – her daughter and her granddaughter – as her legacy. It made me think of a beautiful passage written by Cheryl Strayed: "Love is the feeling we have for those we care deeply about and hold in high regard. It can be light as the hug we give a friend, or heavy as the sacrifices we make for our children. It can be romantic, platonic, familial,

fleeting, everlasting, conditional, unconditional, imbued with sorrow, stoked by sex, sullied by abuse, amplified by kindness, twisted by betrayal, deepened by time, darkened by difficulty, leavened by generosity, nourished by humour, and loaded with promises and commitments that we may or may not want or keep.”

So, I continue to send grandma updates about Issy. I try to not let her inappropriate comments bother me.

I let her love me, and be proud of me, secretly, in her own way.

，

# Authors

***Annonynya Mouse** lives in a luxury box in Mullville, mulling about the cheeses of the world. Mouse likes food for thought, and also likes thoughts on food. Aside from poetry, sometimes Mouse also dabbles in prose.*

*[Simon Berry](#) is a recovering lawyer who calls Hong Kong home. He has completed an MFA in creative writing and a PhD in English literature at City University. In addition to writing short stories, his novels [A Wasting Asset](#), and [A Debt To Pay](#) are available on Amazon. He is working on his next fantasy novel.*

***Andrew Barker** has lived in Hong Kong since 1996. He is a literature professor at HKU and Lingnan Universities and the operator of the poetry lectures website [andrew.barker@mycroft-online-lectures.com](mailto:andrew.barker@mycroft-online-lectures.com) where readings of his poetry can be found. He has published the collections Snowblind from my Protective Colouring, Joyce is Not Here: 101 Modern Shakespearean Sonnets and Orange Peel: Modern Shakespearean Sonnets Book 2. Sonnets 102-203 which are available on Amazon, and is currently completing Social Room: Modern Shakespearean Sonnets Book 3. Sonnets 204-305.*

***Andrew Greene** was born among the hop vines and sagebrush in the deserts of Washington state. He eventually found his way to teaching kindergarten in international schools. Andrew fills his time playing chess, writing an occasional drunken poem, and submitting fake classifieds as a private investigator.*

**Grace Shao** consults with MNCs and big techs on their strategic positioning and crisis management. She was a journalist in her former life, having reported and written for CNBC, SCMP, CGTN, Yahoo Finance, and many more. Grace likes to read and write about business, geopolitics, history, non-fiction, and character-led stories.

# Artists



**Tree (cover)**  
Mike Provost



**Ideas of Curation**  
Kasra Shroff



**Stormy Silence**  
Titilope Olowfela



**An Eye for an I**  
Rebecca Dandridge-Walker



**Insomnia**  
Julien Pantz



**Geisha Texting**  
Ricky Sadosa



**Not Today**  
Philippe Joly



**Entering the MTR**  
Rebecca Isjwara



**Character**  
Rebecca Dandridge-Walker



**Ties and Sunbeams**  
Titlope Olowofela



**Who Wants to Go First?**  
Cassandra Lee

