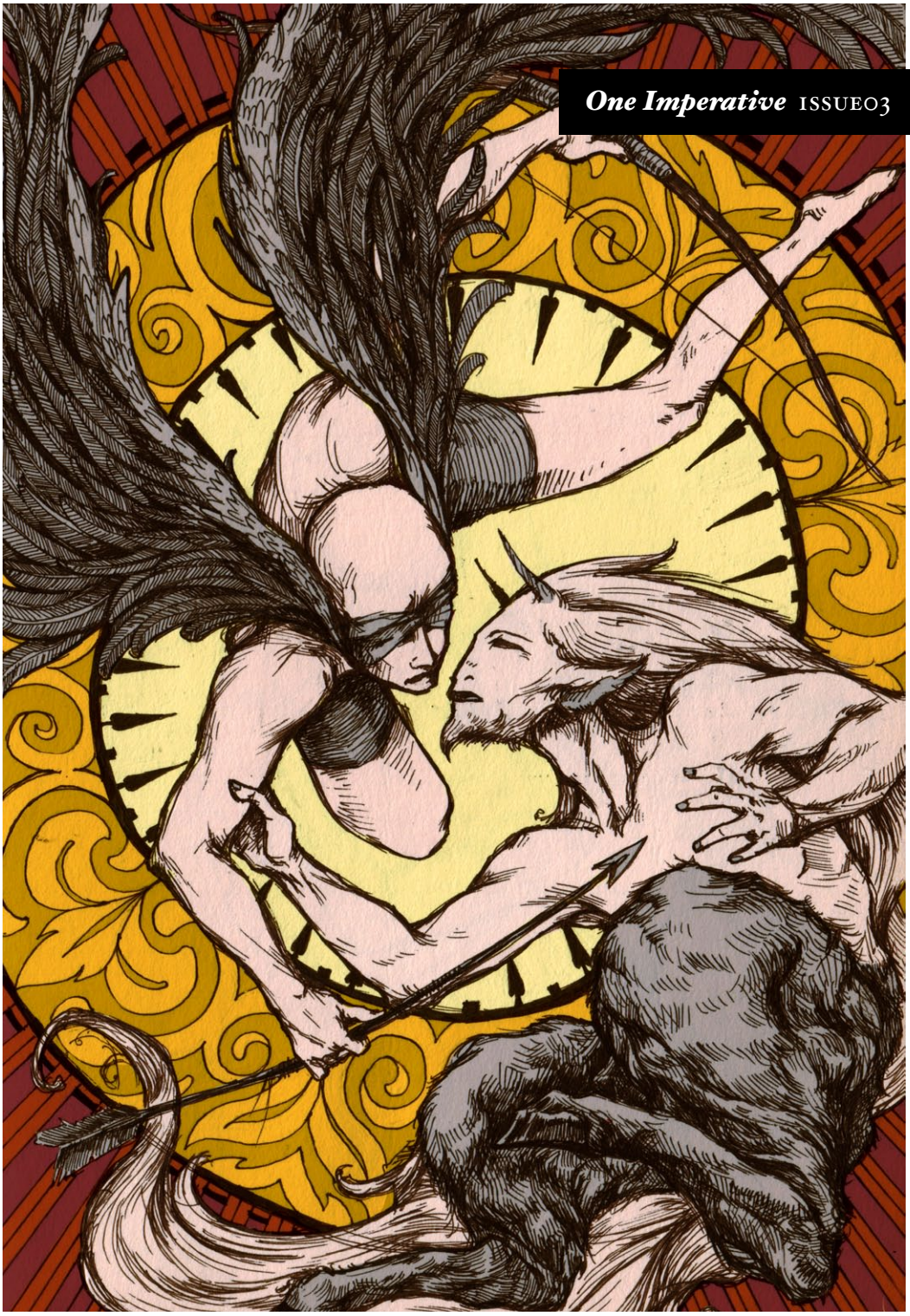
One Imperative ISSUE03



front cover

SARA CHONG
Philia. Ink, 2009

One Imperative

PHILIA

ISSUE 03

01	JEREMY FERNANDO	In Defence of Lost Causes; on paedophilia
06	LIM LEE CHING	The Ballad of Ryan White
08	ASHLYNN SUM	Shorts
10	GEOSHINO OLLSCIA	Deep Autumn
12	JEANE REVEENDRAN	Facebook Philia
16	YANYUN CHEN	Squid
18	GEOSHINO OLLSCIA	Untitled
20	JIAYING SIM	Tell Me Your Story
22	REBECCA G. YEO	To Par(take) of You
24	HWANG PAO-I	Second Life
32	LIM LEE CHING	Bookmarks
38	JEREMY FERNANDO	Love Song for a Seraph or what if Angels fall in love

IN DEFENCE *of* lost causes; *on* *pedophilia*

by

JEREMY FERNANDO

Whenever we think of a relationship between a child and an adult – outside the confines of a nurturing one – there is a gut reaction of anger, distaste, and sometimes even hatred. After all, the first thing can comes to our mind is that this is an exploitative relationship; that is one between unequals. One of the predominant fantasies is that relationships occur between two parties that are complete equals; what is glossed over is the fact that in order for this to be true, each person has to be valuated. In order words, there has to be an abstraction of the human into a value, a figure, which then can be equalized with another. However if we choose to maintain the singularity of the person, then we must also accept that equality is a myth; in other words the phrase "relationship between equals" is at best a figure of speech, or one operating at a symbolic level.

This may be the reason why *Lolita* has caused so much controversy over the years – not so much because there is a relationship between Humbert and Delores (after all, who does not someone who has been with someone far younger or older) but because Nabokov actually has the gall to suggest that Lola might have actually been – at least at some points – the one in control. For there is nothing more devastating to our sensibilities than having the very basis of our assumptions come crashing down; and what greater myth to challenge than that of the 'pure' child, the 'carte blanche' that we can nurture, and bring up in ways that are beneficial to society. However, the question of whether Humbert, or Lola, calls the shots is a moot one; what remains interesting for us is the fact that at various points one of them is dominating the other. In other words, not only is there an unequal relation at any one time, but that this relationality is reversible.

One must not forget the lengths we go to in order to protect our illusions, in particular that of normalcy – that people have to behave in particular manners in order that there is order in society. After all, what other function do prisons and mental institutions serve but to delineate the difference – the absolute separation – between normalcy and aberrance. And in order for these mechanisms to have any legitimacy, one has to fall upon a social order, a generally accepted

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behaviour, and more than that, a naturalized behaviour. This is why it is rather common to hear comments such as "(s)he murdered them like an animal"; somehow nobody seems to question the fact that animals don't actually murder each other – they kill each other out of necessity rather than some linear motif.

But perhaps it is this lack of necessity – the notion of doing something out of desire – that gives us a certain glimpse at

relationality, and perhaps even love. For it is not as if one has to love someone; in some way one chooses to love another. But it is not as if this choice is composed totally out of one's will either; one does 'fall in love', one is enamored of the other – one might even go as far as to say that one is out of

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one's mind when in love. In some way Marilyn Manson has captured this paradoxical situation in his song *Devour*, when he says "I can't sleep till I devour you," in the same breath as "and I'll love you, if you let me." The relationality between oneself and the other person only happens when one calls it into being, but at the same time this calling is only possible if the other allows that calling to take place. Hence one is only in a relationality with the other insofar as the other is in a relationality with one: here it is Søren Kierkegaard who captures it elegantly in *The Seducer's Diary* when he says, "'My' – what does this word designate? Not what belongs to me, but what I belong to, what contains my whole being, which is mine insofar as I belong to it." (146)

Of course we can find this dual relationality, this symbolic exchange – where both remain wholly singular – in the impossibility of the statement "when two become one." It was clearly never about people (that would be impossible), but about time. This is a promise that is made about the future, which is always already in the past (for when said, it is already over); and lived out in the present. And this is the moment of the "I do"; nothing more, and infinitely nothing less. For in this moment lies a nod towards madness – how can one person possibly say, at any juncture, with any certainty, that they will spend their lives with this other person. But it is this moment of madness, this "I do," which translates to "I will spend the rest of my life with this person even though I know it is not possible to say it with any surety," that gives marriage its beauty. It is truly this mad decision that saves marriage from banality and allows us to glimpse a moment of sublime-ness.

In fact, here one is tempted to take it all the way through, and posit that not only is it an act of madness, it is also an act of sheer stupidity; where one makes the decision with no reason, makes a decision that is beyond any reason. And it is precisely this stupidity that allows relationships to operate in the realm of the symbolic: for any relationship that is based on

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reason, on logic, on exchangeability, is a purely strategic, calculated one; and by extension means that both parties involved are exchangeable too. Hence it is stupidity that ensures that both parties are in a relationship that is beyond use – that is useless in the precise sense of exchanging nothing but the fact that they are in a situation of relationality.

However if it is a decision that is made beyond reason, then we are back in the realm of the infant, the one before language, the one that exists outside of reason itself.

Which might be precisely why we are uncomfortable the moment children are involved in any relationship; not because it is inappropriate, but rather that the very possibility of a relationship depends on the people involved being children. Perhaps what really scares us is not that children are taken advantage of, but the fact that the issue that dominates most of us lives – relationality and love – are always already beyond our control, beyond our ability to know.

In this manner, we are always pedophiles; the very possibility of love and relationality depends on it.

———

www.jeremyfernando.com

The Ballad of Ryan White

——LIM LEE CHING

In the end, we can only improve on the fatal futility of fact.
If we know how.

The destructive love, they coiled
And recoiled, like sweetened tales
Of adder-ridden charms

In birth, in life,
In the breach of the lashing lights.
Those lights unleashing unrelenting promptings.
The fear – theirs – capsuled in
The moment of moments.

Contagion is a branded, brand new, sorrow.
It beats and heaves and heaves again,
In surviving, survived none – refused all.
It heaves and beats again.

The dusting of skin demanded ghastly grey,
As if flushed skin needs be infused with
Prognoses and judgement.

Here the intimations of intuition
Completes the cycles of confusion
And then heaves again, pricking conscience.

Only the facts remain.

Shorts

—Ashlynn Sum

faith

Muhammad is nervous. Strapped to his chest are enough explosives to wipe out 5000 lives. But he knew he had to go through with it. In his heart he feels that it's his duty to uphold religious justice. He said a final prayer and steps into his mosque.

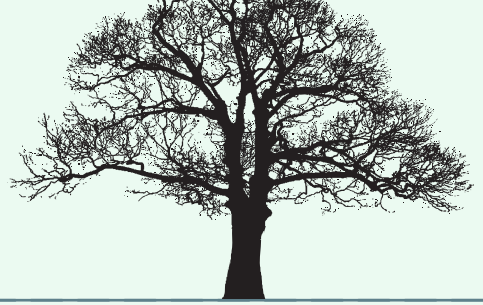
black sheep

"Wasn't that a good sermon," Horace said to his wife Amy who said nothing and locked herself in the bedroom. Mumbling psalms to himself, Horace unlocked the basement door and went in to visit its 8-year-old hostage. Horace looks at her with lust. "Let me absolve you of your sins."

the *wonders* of design

It was long, sleek, silver and smooth—like something out of a science fiction movie. Abigail stared in wonder of its design. Her heart raced, she's been waiting for that moment for a long time. She cradles it in her hand and gets under the sheets. Then, gentle buzzing.

Deep Autumn



—GEOSHINO OLLSCIA

I have a present for you here
yes
let's just for now
call it

a Deep Autumn

because the swirling
is present the 'being caught'

is present 'in the breath of wind'
is present Think

of my Deep Autumn for you
as a colorful ceremony for the death

of an unhappy youth

Because when you told me
he was moving to arizona
to avoid a second date

I believed you

were sad

and that humor

is a safe place

where in my Deep Autumn

you no longer have to hide

And after all
there aren't any leaves here

No *He leaves* or *She leaves*
so I suppose we might as well just call it

by it's common name
what I have for you

yes

let's just call it love

facebook philia

jeane reveendran

cyber disorders

There are over 564 different Cyber disorders listed in the Cyber-Disorders manual of Cyber Psychiatric Health. Due to the overwhelming fondness towards Facebook, the Council of Cyber-Disorders has devoted a manual purely to Facebook-Philia. When love gets a little out of control, unprecedented behaviour is likely to proceed. This article includes etiology, symptoms, treatment options, and prognosis for the 2 most common disorders. The Council of Cyber-Health aims to develop the manifesto of the Facebooker VS unhealthy Philia.

disorder #1: Fanatipoking-philia

CATEGORY

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

ETİOLOGY

Fanatical poking can develop out of simple compulsive behaviour or it can be a result of extreme trauma from past bullying via jabbing or elbowing. İt can also include "sheep throwing" and "Barrel of Monkeys throwing" disorder.

TREATMENT

Treatment may involve getting the individual to poke a hard surface intensely for 15 minutes. Poking time should increase as treatment progresses. Additionally, they should receive jabs by a poking devise intermittently while poking the hard surface. İf individual is diagnosed with mass fanatical poking, more than one poking devise should be introduced. Granite is highly suggested as it hurts one's fingers expeditiously in the most legal of ways.

PROGNOSİS

Prognosis is good, especially if the individual has some insight into the disorder and does not develop excessive "Sheep throwing" symptoms. This may lead to serious complications as pets, furry boyfriends or razorless girlfriends might also be in serious danger of being thrown at family members and friends. İt always starts with a sheep, but it hardly ever ends there. Smaller animals, boyfriends and razorless girlfriends are usually more likely to be in danger than larger ones. Why attack is mainly on family members and friends is still unknown.

disorder #2: Manic-status-Philia

CATEGORY
Bi-polar disorder (Manic Depressive)

ETIOLOGY
Manic-status-Philia is mostly predominant in Asian families where emotions are rarely acknowledged, and often coerced into being discounted. Patients grow up in environments where they are told not to cry after they have fallen down, because it does not hurt. Parents deny their children any form of expression; even happiness is seen as a disease best avoided.

In order for diagnosis to be secure, one must experience a minimum of one manic episode. Mania can be described as the exact opposite of depression. An intense high where one feels exhilaration, invincible in areas such as intelligence, or relationships. They may have an elevated self-esteem. The high, although it may sound appealing, will often lead to severe difficulties in these areas, such as

What's on your mind?

1 Mrs (insert boss's name here) sucks, she can take her company and stick it up her ass for all I care, I don't need that promotion, who cares if I'm losing my house, family and kids, I'm a happy and well-adjusted person."

2 Yo Brenda! I slept with your boyfriend and he was awe-some, yes I do think you are fat and plastic surgery is a good idea even if you're not thinking about it.

3 I cried because I was touched when I first heard "Don't cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me." It was intense.

TREATMENT
There are specific scenes in movies that are highly effective in producing appropriate emotional responses. The three most important emotions to develop accurately are happiness, fear and sadness. This is commonly known as scene therapy.

Scene Therapy

SADNESS
Titanic: Just before Jack falls into the water and drowns.
For A Stronger Dose
Titanic: When Jack falls in the water and drowns.

HAPPINESS
Finding Nemo: When Nemo is found.

For a stronger dose
Finding Nemo: When Nemo is found (watch it three times)

FEAR
I know what you did last summer: When Jennifer Love Hewitt screams in the rain in her white transparent singlet, "what are you waiting for?"
For a stronger dose
Movie poster: I still know what you did last summer (The idea that a sequel was made after the first movie is enough to instill intense fear; only use for extreme cases)

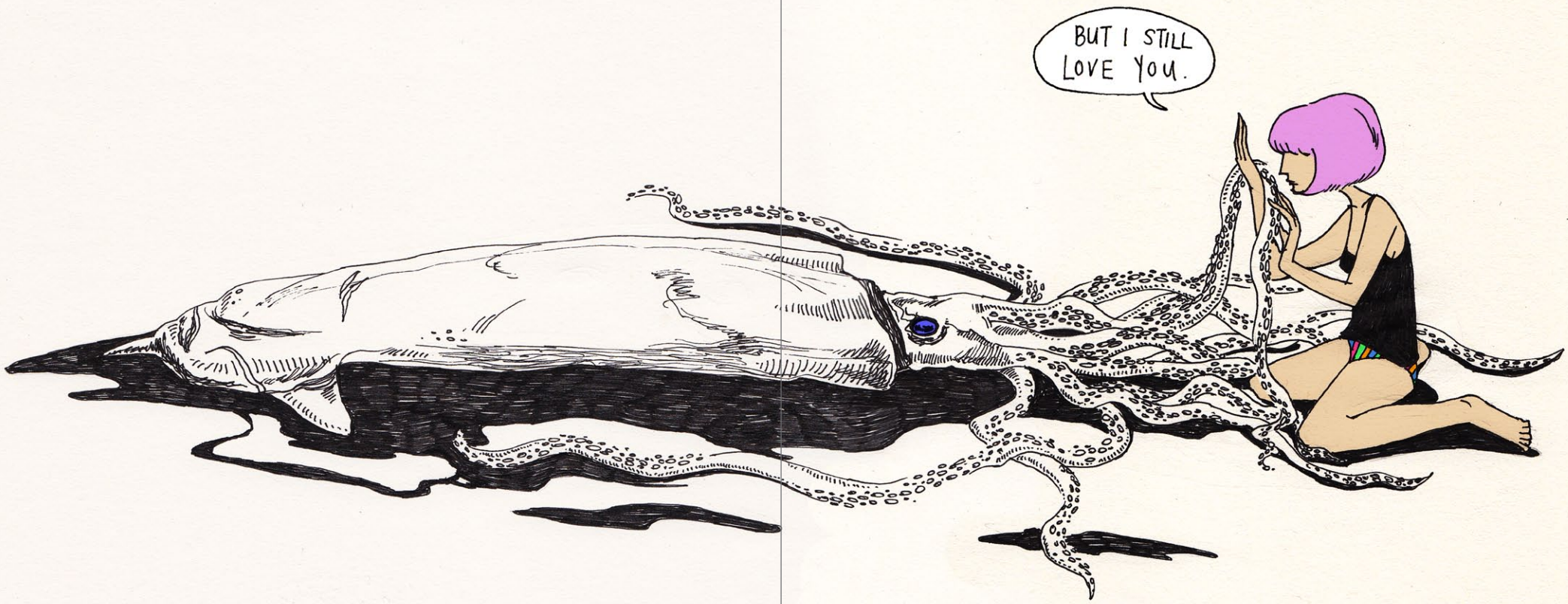
PROGNOSIS
Prognosis is good if the individual is able to respond appropriately to the different scenes. Laughter may occur during screening of I know what you did last summer as wobbling boobies in white tank tops have that effect on many individuals. However, this should not cause any alarm, simply proceed to the movie poster and fear should return.

last words from the Council

Love is a many splendid thing, we the Council of Cyber-Health believe that one should be fully equipped to handle passion, love and fondness before one takes on cyber social networks. Call it what you like, Philia or disturbing obsession for things you want to hide but can't, it doesn't change the fact that love makes us do crazy things sometimes. So, know what you are getting into.

You are not your Facebook account,
you are not your Facebook account…

What remains of love
is a limp, wet tentacle
of a dead giant squid.



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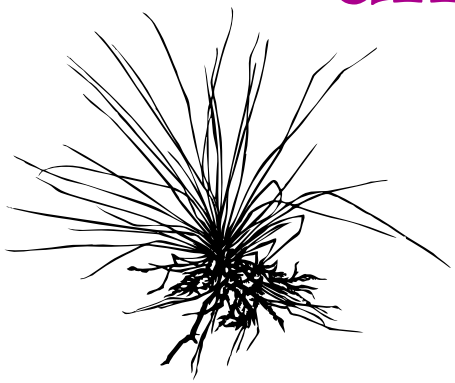
—GEOSHINO OLLSCIA



When she answers I can hear her huffing and puffing, carrying the weight of things in her voice. "Yeah," she explains, breathlessly, "I'm at the gym." I laugh good-naturedly, approvingly, with love, imagining her stepping on the elliptical machine in grand sweeps, the other boys all staring. She laughs briefly but then turns her tone to business, hiding the gigantic well of affection, I'm guessing so the dogs don't get the wrong idea, think she's someone who will just give it away. But she lets me know she cares, even with her guard up. She asks me about my day, if things are alright. I tell her they are, and about new job prospects, plans for the evening. She shares my enthusiasm and encourages my dreams. I pass the attention sceptre back through the phone.

"How was yours?" I ask.

She tells me it was difficult, largely challenging. She doesn't elaborate, something keeps her, holds things inside again. Maybe it's the environment, the room full of people and workout machines. But I know it's been hard for her lately, more than just today, and that she'll be fine once she's arrived at a certain place. For now it's just best to leave the burdens of the day behind as she spins again and again, legs and arms and everything.

"Work it out, baby. Work it out," I want to say. "Run to the sea."

tell me your story

—JIAYING SIM

"I wish you'd tell me stories from time to time."

She always had this way of choosing the most ridiculous moment to say something—when I already have one foot in dreamland, and the other's dangling off the bed. Of course, I never tell her I enjoyed her outbursts of expressions, even if they were at the expense of sleep. Nobody should know of the edge they have over you.

"I'm not your jester, you know that right?"

"That's not what I mean. I wish you'd be less edgy. I just thought it'd be nice to listen to your stories."

"But words, they have this way of failing me. Besides, I'm no Gaiman."

"Words don't fail you. You're just afraid, afraid of what, I don't know. That you will unknowingly share more of yourself with each story you tell, or that someone might figure out the directions to the secret dungeon. It's called fiction for a reason."

"I am not afraid to tell you what I know; admit what I don't; expose what I think. But I assure you, should I share my stories, you will hate them."

"Why. Are they about cockroaches?"

"No."

"Then I think we'll be fine."

"Well—"

I no longer remember what I wanted to say that day. It does not matter now, as with many other things, for she interrupted me, excitedly the moment I uttered my first word. That was the only way she knew how to interrupt. If you ask me, that is the only way one should interrupt.

"I hate cockcroaches. I think they are secretly aliens which have invaded Earth. How else can anything be so disgusting? Do you think Aliens exist?"

She changes subjects the way one might surf TV channels. Sometimes you flip through the channels, searching quickly for something that might interest you; other times you linger a little longer, hoping to get something more out of the show. Sometimes you decide that it's just not worth sitting through the boring bits. At the end of the day, there's always something else to watch anyway.

"Well, I'm pretty sure they are not aliens. But a reminder of the stupid things in life that should just disappear. And they smell terrible."

Smell; that's a funny word, you would say. And I would look at you, thinking the only thing funny is the way you cringe your nose and squint your eyes as you say that word.

Sometimes, when we are talking, she would look at me with an expression on her face—faraway, similar to one of those paparazzi snapshots of celebrities, where the subject never looks directly at the camera because too many are on her, and how does one know where to look. On other days, I would be tempted to stop whatever I am saying and interject it with "so I held hands with the pink elephant and we twirled in circles till Jumbo came home in a foam bubble, shaped like the letter D.". But most days, I understand that I am slowly, but surely, losing her with each sentence I complete. And so I just stop mid-sentence—

When you ask for a story, it scares me, it feels like I have a string of ice cubes ride up my back, straight to my brains, and I am afraid. Not of what you might get from my stories, but what you might not.

So, please don't ask me to tell you a story.

TO (PART)AKE OF YOU

—REBECCA G. YEO

"We cannot love and be limited" Alfred Addler

I love lying under night's blanket of stars
as the breeze and still quietness caress my skin
like skinny dipping in a pool of watery beams, bathed in pale moonlight,
skin immersed in the translucent shadows of the night,
veiled in silhouettes as a cricket sings
alongside my stream of dreams thinking
yet how much more I love skin against skin
yours
next to on top of under beside mine
gazing, unblinking, exclaiming
Soft gentle creased tender smooth yearning taut
beginnings of beautiful familiar wonder
as heartbeats reach out reach in
touch... slide... glide... pause
to drink in the comfortable silence that surrounds the waking hours
The first flash whips the silvery sky and I
like a bird on a telephone wire leap inside
a joy ride as metallic offerings line my tongue

and subdue my senses
wreak havoc with words waiting to be strung into sentences
finding ways of luring me into delusional misgivings as
waiting turns inside out
topsy turvy around and curvy
the scribbles
doodles of yesterday's thoughts
fears
dreams
hopes
imaginings
and I, vulnerable to its swirl of illusion and constant clamour
glazed to the scene that plays
to the tune of a carousel waltz
mechanical preened equestrian glamour
beats time in faultless, metered rhapsody
as my thoughts continue to wander
meander...
next to on top of under beside
you

second life

by HWANG PAO-I

‘Just log in,’ I heard my friend say, ‘if you still don’t like it, just log out again.’

There was a pause, then I heard a woman crying. Even though I did not know the reason for her sorrow, I could feel it penetrate me. It was a poignant moment and I remembered clearly why I had quit the game last time. My friend, who was standing next to me, nudged me impatiently and reminded me that she had a mission to complete and if I was going to help her at all we needed to get going.

‘We’re in a hospital,’ she said, ‘this is where it always starts, have you forgotten?’

‘It’s been a long time, and I don’t remember seeing her. Her tears, she is so sad. Don’t you want to know why she’s crying or for whom?’ I asked moving a little and looking around.

‘Oh please,’ she laughed, ‘stop acting like such a noob! This is a game and new patches are being put in all the time. If a person doesn’t have the tattoo on them they’re just a computer generated character.’

I looked at the character a little closer, searching for the tattoo that would tell me that her sorrow was not real and that my compassion was unnecessary. Two men entered carrying a bloodstained stretcher on which lay a body that was shrouded in white. On seeing them, the woman shrieked and fell to the ground sobbing as if her heart was broken. ‘They have really taken you this time!’ she cried. ‘Why have they done this to me? What have I done to deserve this? You were a brave soldier, you did everything you could, but now you leave me grieving on my own.’

I thought her lines were a little too pat and started to feel that I was truly over-reacting.

One of the men asked, 'Is it all right if we put the body on the floor?'

The distraught woman looked at him in a confused manner. She seemed unable to understand what she had just heard, as if the suggestion was either too ludicrous or her mind was simply in another place. I was equally surprised by such a suggestion and completely related to her confusion. The subtlety and appropriateness of her reaction made me question again whether she was indeed only computer generated or a player. There were no tattoos. My friend burst into raucous laughter, which I thought would have been very inappropriate if the situation had been real, and would have been too if the woman was also a player because once a character in the game died, it was dead for good. That was why I didn't like the game. If this was all a *game*, why did things have to get so serious? And, if it was only for *fun*, why couldn't some things be less complicated, less *realistic*?

A few hours in the game could seem like a lifetime. Relationships could progress quickly, without fear of inconvenient consequences, and many achievements were easily obtainable for those who felt that real life wasn't regularly rewarding them with things to brag about. In the game, the impatient did not have to have their patience tested and the reckless were often rewarded for the flare that they had for living a second life that was less than ordinary. What people loved about the game was that it opened a whole new world where looks no longer counted, age did not matter and conscience was unimportant. The

"What people loved about the game was that it opened up a whole new world where looks no longer counted, age did not matter and conscience was unimportant.

only thing that mattered was your imagination and how far you could stretch it.

My friend's 'mission', what she wanted me to help her with, was to earn enough gold to 'marry' the 'man of her dreams'. She had been seeing a 'skier', a person who had earned all the titles for all the skiing events ever held and who could also ski most of the online players to shame. She wanted to impress him with achievements of her own and since she was good at making money, she decided that she was going to try and become a millionaire. In order to do that, she needed a few 'reliable' friends and I happened to be one of them in real life.

At first I thought he was a computer generated character; without actually seeing a tattoo it is very hard to tell when a character is really a person, since humans could behave like machines as the number of possible actions is controlled to a degree and some behaviour can seem repetitive. However, the reactions of a computer generated character are similar to those of humans because they are limitless, like a person's response to something may vary according to his personal history and where he is at that moment in time, so the slightest change in a character's mood or his previous actions leading up to the point where two particular characters interact could trigger a myriad of responses. To make second-guessing a very difficult task, all characters are affected by kaleidoscopic 'moods' that occur randomly like the numbers of a lottery. In other words, it is often impossible to predict whether the interaction between one character and another is purely human or human and machine, since there is no pattern to calculate which is which. Hence the 'realism' and the 'apparent' fun. To enter a world so similar to life, live it as you please, and not reap the certain consequences of real living. To gamble for fame, fortune or even love, without fear of winning or losing, was tempting to a lot of people who worked hard to maintain a secure, if also sterile, real life. Play itself was the name of the game.

His name was Lancelot and it should all have been good innocuous, virtual fun. He was an excellent warrior and chivalrous like

his namesake. If virtual characters could be taken seriously as manifestations of true heroes then he was without a doubt a hero and I somehow got to experience Guinevere's bittersweet love. It was a pleasure completing missions with his help, I enjoyed chatting to him and receiving messages and gift-wrapped items in the mail. What worried me a slightly was the sheer amount of time he spent in-game, even computer generated characters were programmed to log off and be unavailable every so often, but he seemed to be online practically all the time. This made me think he was either a computer and didn't have a real life to attend to or he was a real person who simply had the luxury of staying online for as long as he wished. So, when he asked me out I had accepted. What was the harm? This was a game. He might even be just a computer program. My life was secure, I was a university lecturer without a nine-to-five job, my husband encouraged me to play the game and use it as a de-stressing tool, when my children were in school I had plenty of free time, and it was a good feeling to see how naturally and quickly I completed missions and overcame challenges. In a word, I got addicted; but what was worse, I fell in love with Lancelot. I started having an emotional affair. Slowly, the game took over my life and started to affect the real people around me. I found it hard to concentrate on my teaching, stopped preparing meals for my family, rarely went out to meet friends and got irritable when I couldn't be online to live a virtual life that seemed more important than the one I was truly in.

I'm in love with him, my heart told me.

But he's not real, my mind jeered.

I should meet him, said my heart.

How, my mind shot back, you don't even know if he is real!

It's true, my heart quietly cried.

My heart played tug with my mind for many weeks and I agonised at the idea of falling in love with something as surreal as a computer character. I had no idea how to escape that limbo and I knew that sooner or later either my heart or my mind would have to give. Every time I met Lancelot in our virtual heroic world I would face a barrage of ill-formed questions about TRUTH. What did I *really* know about him? In fact, did I *really* want to know? He said he wasn't computer generated that he had a tattoo, but he had chosen to put it in a place where only his 'wife' would see. If I really loved him as he loved me, then I should marry him. So, I did.

He said he was twenty four and in college. I had told him I was thirty two, indeed which woman wouldn't lie about their age if they could, and what was plus or minus eight years here and there? I had also told him I was single. At the time it had all seemed harmless and irrelevant, but now I wasn't so sure. He told me his *real* name was John, was it *true*? Hadn't he also introduced me to his other ten online characters going by the various names of Moby, Z, Daniel, Ganesh, Setsuko, Kenya and even Hermione, for god's sake. He said he wanted to meet up. How I could possibly toy with the idea of meeting a person who, it may be true, had desperately wanted to marry me on cyberspace, but to whom I had also told a bunch of lies? I had let my avatar marry a man in another dimension and now the real me wanted to know the impossible. Could it be only my avatar that was in love, obviously not. *I* was in love, but, with someone else's avatar? And what about him, could he really desire the real me? I wasn't everything I had told him I was and I certainly was nothing like my gun-toting character.

This made me think he was a real person who simply had the luxury of staying online for as long as he wished.

A few days before Christmas, I finally agreed to meet him. He had pleaded like a child on Santa's knee and I did not have the heart to say no. The only request I had was that I be the one to identify and approach him. At 3pm, we would meet at a cafe that neither of us had been to and he would wear a red scarf.

Being a teacher and someone who needed to be punctual, I was sitting at the window of the cafe by 2pm.

I wanted to familiarise myself with the environment because I knew that I was more than liable to pull out at the last minute because of my nerves. Every person, male and female, that walked by with a red scarf sent my spine crawling. You know just how to steel yourself, I kept reminding myself, imagine walking into a new class at the start of term or imagine what it is like to talk to a room of strangers at a conference.

The cafe was very warm and the sun shone brightly outside, the only way to tell that it was a freezing winter's day was the amount of clothes that people were wearing and the white plumes that they were displaying between their teeth. For fifty years it had not snowed in the city, but unbelievably and almost imperceptibly it started to. I sat up in my chair and watching spellbound completely forgot what I was waiting for. I strained my eyes to catch the little specks, but soon they turned into cotton balls falling like pieces of a cloud from the blue sky. From amongst the crowd I saw a boy with a comic book tucked under his arm and his eyes turned heavenwards; even from a distance I could see the glow in his eyes lit up by his wondering smile; he could not have been more than sixteen. His dark hair curled around his ears and down his neck, his skin was smooth and had not come under the razor, his lips were beautifully formed and almost girlish in its pinkness. He bounced on his heels with the energy of an adolescent but stooped slightly lacking the confidence of a grown man. Without really looking, he niftily weaved through the crowds and politely held the door open for me as I left the cafe. I didn't need the confirmation of the red scarf, I knew it was him. He looked into my eyes and I caught a distant flicker of recognition that quickly mingled with unbridled youthful desire, before I walked by without looking back.

I caught a flicker of recognition that quickly mingled with unbridled youthful desire, before I walked by without looking back.

He was the most beautiful child I have ever met. I could not bear to know his disappointment, which was why I committed character suicide. But, for him, I broke my heart.

When my friend asked me to restart the game again, it was not without a lot of convincing. I knew that computer generated characters were all over the place, but I couldn't play anymore with the uncertainty of their possible humanity. Every character, their every act and every word goaded me to evaluate their authenticity. I knew to what extent it was possible to bond with a character in-game, to what extent mental and emotional attachment was a human weakness. There was no turning back once the mind or the heart was set. This chasm between humanity and machines I did not want to bridge too soon.

'Kiss him, quickly!' My friend typed out at the speed of lightning.

A little harmless fun had come at a great sense of personal loss. I had hurt myself and I didn't want to do that to someone else too. Besides, I thought, if the man in front of me was real wouldn't I look like a real ass kissing him for no reason? What chain of reactions might I set off? That kind of frivolity simply wasn't a part of my personality, either in-game or in reality.

'What if he's real?' I asked.

'What? Are you stupid? He's buttnaked and do you see any tattoos? This is computer generated, he's a rare. How many times have you ever seen a naked guy running around? He'll drop a great item, bag him! Quick!'

There's not enough ethics to this game I thought as I ran to kiss him.

He had read what my friend said and gestured me to stop. 'I can't do this again,' he said, 'I have a wife and three children.' He looked sad and sounded genuinely guilty. Wait. A thought started to niggle at the back of my mind. Maybe it is thinking and feeling that generates human actions. But even if this character wasn't really human, couldn't the actions and reactions of a computerized character point to its own kind of emotions and mindset? Couldn't it be simply answering to a different kind of conscience?

Bookmarks

—LIM LEE CHING

The lone walker hears the secrets of the wind and the voices of the trees.
The path is not tongue-tied.
Here, strong lines persist, incanting, singing.
How does the judgement, what criteria persist
To keep the premise sound? It is written and shall be read.
The strong lines and certain doubts exact change.
It stands thus to reason that it shall be pleasing.
Truth and beauty remain
Of brush strokes and clean lines
Leading the way and the coloured imaginings.
Concealment and transgressions are such delicate gestures
As are learning and gesturing.
Only the words remain to be spoken, the writing to be sung
Of happinesses witnessed and tongues tied
In full contemplation of the idea of ideas.
Remember the rules of memory in order
That it may coolly be accorded its place in the deep space
Between the seeing and reading that these words demand.
They love a little strangeness in order to test the edges of conjecture.
For what loads more than the values of being just. In time
All that go long also go up as memory of fire.
Distance takes the soul off blame, off exclusion –
This is not the province of king, colonel or clown,
Nor the realm of whisperers seeking to please.
By rendering asunder, it is fused, conflated, returned to line.
Persistence is not learning. Persistence cannot be unlearned.
The foundations established by the building blocks of comprehension
May not be mere adagia – it must gather.
Distance dances preclude ordered methods, pleasing encryptions.
Choice is evaluated according to the cloths laid feet-down,
Not the testimony of pride.
Through this all there has been no escape from expanding doubt
Nor lessons in terminality.
In truth, the source of ignorance may well be reluctant pursuit.
The way to compulsion can come to close
As other delights arise, other lures
Drawing sight into the realm of perfect beauty.
The cult of stability and singular meaning
Diminishes ascendant beauty, delight and breath-hope.
Licence and liberty are only cloaks, nothing more.
Goose-steps are not hoof-taps – they do not tire,
And yet they dig on, scoring the spell onto meaning, onto a basis
For believing abjectly the sound of thoughtdepth.
Persistent therefores are fallacious,
They bind while unleashing the gateward push.
Suffer the testimony of pride
And branded pleasure that go right through the marrow of memory.
The mind and soul and limbs and heart be as one, as many,
Upward in glory of wishfulness on wings of wisdom.
This afterall is the race of consolation.
Victimhood has no sum but the total of contrivance,
As the two of the dance in waltzes in nines.
Trembling limbs hold aloft the taut words:
Lines stretching far into the north of a past.
There the hundred riders dance a little lick
Gathering up the pinned down sighs in marred frigidity,
Where lies a totality stretched in quarters and sixths.

And still the pleasing pulse beats to the long day.
Daring little steps of glancing thoughtspace.
Keep pace, keep apace of what is left and what refused.
The gleaming blade trembles and pierces
This fall of falls, with fireweed summerbreeze.
There is no death here, so no crying shoulders,
Only clumps of anxious logic to tap the rhythm of smoke.
To each his card, for each his hour
Which inching futureward relearns the songs of the leaves.
Wandering lost among the layers of liabilities,
Yet killing kindness with tiredness,
And beating and heating the song into submission.
Stealing into the angel's share takes shivering prayer
And flagellation as art.
The value of these words are weighted with the wages of sorrow,
These sculpted fingers must scratch through the layers of song.
Courage sings the scripted fear of expectation
To a reasoning halt, that where it seems, it may lay down.
Keep the song burning, seared into meaningfulness
Keep forgiveness as the dance to a measure of memory
Keep aside an obsession over the might of imagination
Keep courage in the light of what may be seen
Keep faith in the stability of uncertainty
Frailty can turn the cause on its front
Providing the cues for vain utterances.
The portion lost is the weight of ashes.
What favours might there be if the rendering is strained?
Dead words are buried yet mined again, with fervour.
Greenloops flourish in the presence of misapprehension
And are buried again. That heaviness is the weight of

Staggering mediocrity. In time, compasses no longer matter:
Nijinski is a shaman of the garden.
This covenant of words is a nightwish of a race.
Tied tongue insists the words be spoken, the songs sung
In praise of perfection or performance but not both.
Promises, too, can be sound and mean more as consolation.
Platitude in numbers cannot afford pound for pound
The exhaustion of footsteps.
Running with the cadence, the steps making ancient rhymes
That the earth has heard
Whispery songs of woven trances,
Of ancient wisemen oozing
From the dreambirth of each grain of land.
This then is the milk of silence.
What wine and nectar can sway is the surface of grudge.
Here are strong lines leading the way to repetition.
Was it a waltz?
What is left is truly the fragrance of remembrance.
The galloping meaningfulness raises the stakes of wisdom.
Go forth. Accord each a place in abjection.
Receive the supplication of some sincerity
In order to make vulnerability part of experience.
There is no trap but the trickery of reason.
Many as one, step dance song, heart soul, as one.
Before reading and seeing, the thought.
The long day stills the fleeting delight
Of whispers and sighs.
Beneath the lid of passion awakens the phrase
That locates far into the northward of trembling hope.
Here again a little strangeness.

It edges closer on.
Some pushing upward of a past
And now, here, strain the lines of a tender breath.
Weighting yet in seconds and quarters.
Suffer the testimony of vainglory.
The ancient turn completes the repetition of repetitions,
For the direction of time still matters.
Licence and liberty wear a face each
Meeting intimations of few favours.
Offering a posture for legacy,
In full contemplation of this thought of thoughts.
Sorrow is another hundred riders
Chancing out of the darkness into the bright.
The words shiver through these wet pages
As through the coldness of the mind forge.
Penance is the province of princes, not poor men.
These words shall be risen a warm body.
Warmed by the light of lights.
Here lies the awakening
Of the dispensation of an age,
Dismissing the certainty as one in many.
Enthusiasm catches on also as one
In the simplicity of essence and discernment.
Wrapped in the verses are triggers of
Silence that surround the seeing and hearing of
The voices chanting ancient thoughts and futuresongs of
Fearful breaths of tender thoughts of
The place of, the parts of dreams of
Footsteps of dancesteps of songsteps of wordsteps.
They edge closer on.

Trembling limbs hold on still to the taught lines,
Fearful of giving heart to the beauty of succumbing
To the presence of each moment.
The sheets of sound
And walls of light
Beat in quavers, quarter tones and half wits.
The secrets of the wind and voices of the trees
Enchant and sing, enchant and sing.
The lines are just and indeed persist.
What remains is the memory of hope,
The basis of many beliefs, not one.
Absolutes cannot be traded
For a hundred riders, nor another.
The faces put on meet the faces within,
Voices sing directly to the seeing eye that
Vanishes into the echoing wall of the hopes
For the tribe of promise – glancing as witness,
Observation as commitment to memory,
Carved onto the core of consciousness.
Bounded by beauty. As beauty.
Here, surrounded by these covers
Are the pages of the maker
Read.
The ancient turns complete the repetition of repetitions.
In full contemplation of a thought of thoughts,
A fall of falls, warmed by the light of lights,
In full contemplation of the idea of ideas.
It is a force unrelenting.
It is a force contagion.

LOVE SONG
for a seraph
or
WHAT IF ANGELS
fall in love

I can't help but stare;
at her hair impaired
One day we'll say – only in silence perhaps –
what a small affair
But only if I ever got myself to care

I made the mistake of trying to right
a wrong that wasn't even there

Why can't we just sit and bare
our voices, let them run around in the night
and when they trace themselves into our hands,
play with them, in spite of our plans

Colours that spin in our minds
might have something to do with time
Perhaps the two of us should have rhymed
At least our hair was once entwined;

—

JEREMY FERNANDO