

# Waterfall

## Part One

*(the ghost of an old fisherman)*

The waterfall was here when I was but a foolish child;  
It heard the giggles and the screams of the boys who ran wild,  
Four brothers running amok under the scorching summer sun  
Splashing, plunging *whiplash!* like we owed our lives to no one.

The playground was a place of shelter, solace;  
But the roaring laughter was subdued – quieter, then soundless.  
At dusk, nets laid on the large rocks where we stayed  
Away, from the salty breeze and the sapphire blue sea at midday.  
The water saw the trickling sweat down my brothers' necks,  
It saw our hard work, the fresh *wu tau*, and *hung saam yu* on the deck.

I met her long before the falls had slowed.  
Young I was then, and little did I know  
my destiny was slowly forming, fixed in this place,  
my lifeline held together by her grace.  
Her smile could hardly be surpassed by the sun.  
Skin soft as silk *Zhiniü*, she herself had spun.  
And her eyes were fire-dragon eyes.  
Bright as stars of heaven blest with life.

The falls framed her countenance as divine,  
our lips touched for the first of many times.  
She took me for her husband, and I took her for my wife  
And for forty years as one, we wrote a joyous life.

Till one spring the fever took her, her spirit then my own  
(For I did not want to dance alone).  
I passed on soon after, but before long  
I fulfilled her last desire: To float above the falls.  
I miss the life we lived, our laughter and our pain.  
And that is why I remain.

*(a student walks by the waterfall)*

The sun rose while the clouds cleared,  
and as I strolled back home,  
engrossed in my thoughts,  
I took a wrong turn.  
Didn't know where I was,  
what stood before me had such charm.

I had wandered through the city,  
and now I stand in an alternate reality.  
I looked down and saw the pebbles that were my floor,  
clack clack clack they went,  
knocking against each other with the steps I took.  
Clustered together, eclectic shapes and sizes,  
They were crammed down by the coast.  
Just then the sea swooshed in,  
taking them to yet another shore.

My eyes tracked the rocks, the waterfall, the sky,  
big, blustering and bulky  
clouds climbed one on top of another,  
tussling to reach the greatest height.  
Beside the quarrel of the rocks,  
was another battle of the trees -  
untamed, overgrown and ferocious.

I skirted around the spot  
and stopped above the falls -  
a wonderland amidst a forest of concrete.  
The wall of water thundered down,  
Splashing over stones  
thousands and thousands of drops bounced back  
reflecting a faint rainbow.  
Our city hides treasure.  
Delve into the hidden places: here I found  
a corner of Pok Fu Lam secretly alive.

(A child asks the old fisherman questions)

Eh, mister!  
The waterfall?  
Was it always so  
small?  
The reservoir?  
The plants?  
The trees?  
The rocks?  
were they always  
there?

The first thing you should know,  
This waterfall is old. Much older than men.  
Though faltering and fleeting the falls now below  
ten times the breadth these currents once spanned.

Among the eight sights of Xin'An the falls once were included,  
renowned before "Hong Kong" was named.  
When the *gwaitos* came sailing, the falls quenched their thirst.  
In exchange they secured its fame.

The stones here are old. The willow trees too,  
ancient the land beneath your feet.  
Old is the flora. The falls older still,  
feeding the ocean beneath.

Mister!  
Did you taste the water?  
Did you catch fish?  
Did you swim?  
Under the  
free falling, crashing,  
bubbling, flowing water  
joining the sea?

The water was fresh and the people did flourish  
fostering life in the village around it  
*So-ha* and *po-po* too the water did nourish  
lovers and rivals alike took a sip

This waterfall is old. Our people knew this.  
We gathered in worship and praised it in song.  
Offering our thanks to the torrent that fed us,  
we flocked round the falls and our gods came along.

See the statues around you. See the red face of *Guan*.  
See the smile of *Sau Gong*, and *Chiyou's* snarling head.  
Enfixed in stone, in spirit they roam.  
This place is where gods tread.

Mister!  
Now centuries have passed,  
around us things have changed.  
We have many visitors,  
though they travel not just by sea,  
but by land,  
by air.  
And when they come  
their faces show disappointment.  
They always say,  
“Why do the falls no longer show their former glory?  
Why do they not look like the ancient drawings?”

In steel-birds you people call planes  
on railways that snake across the land.  
People visit, by car or by train,  
but what of the waterfall do they understand?

They treat the falls as a folly and laugh at its poor flow.  
They show no respect to the ground on which they tread.  
They treat it as trivial but there's little they know,  
lacking knowledge of all the blood that's been shed!

Blood? Oh mister,  
I have heard some stories,  
but they are too scary to tell!  
What you say excites me,  
Do tell me more!

Do you know of the ghosts that wander this place?  
Do you know the white lady whose face is veiled?  
Some say that at night, when the gods turn their faces,  
you can still make out her wails.

Or of a schoolboy like you who plunged to his death,  
or the souls purged from the cemetery when *Wah Fu* was raised  
Without a warning they were ripped from their rest.  
Without respect they were torn from their graves.

the visitors come but leave  
at night as quickly as they arrived.  
Though there are lights,  
always in a city that never sleeps.  
We are afraid.  
We may have heard some of these legends,  
we know that this waterfall is rich in history,  
but we don't know all the stories:  
of sailors, fishermen, pirates.  
and of the souls that now rest here.  
Please mister,  
will you tell me some more?

Not legends, my child. These tales are all true.  
And your people would do well to fear.  
Of these histories and more, I'd be happy to tell you  
but there's one thing that you must know here.

Remember, my child, this waterfall is *old*.  
Its years are as many as the ocean is wide.  
Aeons of sea-winds have weathered this cove  
where the ocean can drink up the sky.

Forgotten by time, it was once known to all:  
This place where beauty falls.

*(A sailor's ghost)*

This place was  
a haven for  
sailors socked  
in sweat under  
a merciless sun.  
Finding here some  
shade in  
wilderness.  
Hearing the soft  
constant chirp chirp  
chirp chirpings  
of birds.  
to relax  
by the water  
drib drib drib  
and trickles  
ever so slow-softly.

*(the waterfall)*

Yet centuries back, waves of waters  
raced, rushing pushing gushing dashing past  
to reach first the hard rocks  
that topple - let the waters flow and flood fast  
take a plunge bang! splashing and crashing whoosh!  
Straight into the emerald green pool  
reservoir built - Day One, then sssh  
- to surface for a waiting sun as  
water washed by wondered trees,  
the stones, midges, fishes ...the  
whispering started ...waterfall  
well known by sailors and fishermen, a  
haven that kept them safe...Dam!  
We longer know above water -  
Longer, no, the waters up-stocked  
exist - we no longer are waves of waters.

*(student with camera)*

Come closer, closer, closer.  
I mistook the splashy noise for a call.  
My toes clenched in my shoes, firmly,  
as I stepped on the slippery stones  
and went so close  
that I could feel the cleansing mist  
caressing my skin, clearing all stress.  
With eyes closed, limbs relaxed, and mind resting,  
The meditation became a vision.

I stride through the shallow water,  
                  reach the other side, and capture  
this ever-changing palette of dusk, in rapture  
with precise aperture. But  
in an instant, the bulbuls and sparrows have stopped quarreling.  
Only the waves - rushing back  
                  and forth  
mercilessly, ushering the looming darkness into the lens which thirsts for  
another source of light, searching, adjusting the depth of field.  
Pupils dilated to accommodate the silver ripples, over the horizon, into  
dirt-grey coarse marks of the Moon.  
Cloudless, starless, utterly undisguised.  
How bizarrely round, how surreal!

*(A hoarse voice comes from a stone house)*

It's the spring tide, lad. The water has risen too high.  
Tonight, you can't go back. Why? Look at the moon!  
Know what I do - generations who lived in Ap Lei Chau.  
                  Yonder, the legacy of our men, the hooks,  
We baited nets. We cast aloft, in the flamboyant waves and fathomless air  
On boats, it's either faith or fate. For that, you fear and revere the deities  
                  Danger, we respect: Tin Hau, Kwun Yum, we worship with piety  
                  (under a majestic Moon).