

Part Four (B)

A Police Constable

I decided I would become a member of the Force
instead of following in my father's footsteps
butchering fish and selling them to old ladies in the village
I want to protect others and I am destined for something great
 I know that for a fact
Only twenty-five, in prime physical condition
No undesirable habits (smoking, drinking, tattoos)
I've sharpened my wits, polished my boots and built up my muscles
Completed twenty-seven weeks of mandatory training
and passed the final exams with flying colours a year ago
Equipped to handle any unexpected situations and 'problematic' people

Right now, I'm on patrol with my partner (a friend from the Police College)
Patrolling is important, boring as it might seem
 You never know what you'll find or see
 You need to be vigilant and aware of your surroundings
And me, I'm ready for anything,
With the pistol and baton resting against my hip.

Besides, the location isn't bad. It's kind of a coincidence how I was assigned to watch this piece
of land where I grew. I guess what they say is true: your roots always draw you back to where
you come from. And then there's the waterfall, just down Pokfulam Road. I used to hang around
it when I was younger
Me and other children would put our cupped hands into the water
To catch fish barely the size of our little fingers
Only for them to flutter

 leap,
 and

 and

 plunge

 back
 where
 they came from

In the end, we'd give up
and start splashing each other instead

(that was more fun)

The waterfall shape-shifts according to the weather

After a storm

The flood would **roar**, cascading

down

the rocks

before **lurching** into the pond

The origin of all: majestic in its glory

Sometimes it wouldn't rain for days

The waterfall would whimper,

trickling

down

the cliff before **f a d i n g** into the almost-lake

A small dribble like a baby's drool

Us kids would gather along the shoreline, squatting or standing

Heads dipped, looking into rippling bubbling seaweed-green

To see our *distorted* reflections staring back — at us

Soon to be torn apart by a lone stone skipping by

The darkness lurking in the murky hollow

Crooking its finger at me as if to say

"come hither"

Creeping and rising up, threatening to

d e v o u r m e

That was the stuff of my childhood nightmares

But as time floods by, I've grown out of it and learnt to conquer my fears

Now I serve and protect, walking on with my partner,

chatting with each other, yet on high alert for any impending disasters

Overseeing houses that once sheltered me and countless others:

Witnesses of history.

I saw the fire dragon falling into the sea
It was only straw and weeds.
For generations
The elders talked with fairytale bliss
about how the dragon
could scare away the spirits of disease

Now, the old myth was busted
when COVID-19 came along.
Anyway, it's just a traditional play
which gives an excuse for grandmas
to tell their grandsons
to put down their computer games

We didn't only play computer games:
sometimes we went swimming near the waterfall.

When we went home
with buckets of fresh water
Mum would then ask
"Why does it take so long for you to collect water?"

Because we didn't just go for a swim,
We also caught fish in an inlet
which led to the waterfall -
now buried under
the concrete of the reservoir.
Now we can't come near to the waterfall
it's said to be too risky.

I wish I had seen the waterfall
When it was still mighty
Unlike the trickle flowing now.

In our summer dreams,
The Waterfall is still the same waterfall
flowing from the mountain into our minds
with memories still enshrined.

I've still got those summer dreams now.

“Put on this size M T-shirt and you are one of us

stretch out your arm into the thousand arms
that strive to reach the burning sticks
come and poke come and penetrate come and
say your prayers but behold! whisper only...
you don't want to let others hear you breathe
or He will grant you the opposite of what you wish

you are part of his fire now, you exist in his smoke
your memory your history your streaming consciousness
you are inside his breaths

take this bamboo holder and follow the lead
when the head runs you run, when the head lifts you lift
when he sways you sway
you are his flesh his claws his scales
you are his body”

then the drums beat and bang
gongs scream and strike
hoy ah-hoy

heya-hoy

ah-yah hoy

ah-hey ah-hoy

hey-ah hoy

Can he understand my heathen prayers?
Can he smell my foreign smoke?
Can he decode my crude cacuminal accent from the north?
Cantonese is like a musical incantation to me
I get sentimental with it, I sleep with it, it runs out of my blood.
Will he take me as one of his own,
the favoured children of the waterfall
As we send him to his aqueous rest?

I feel Pokfulam as I hold his spine.

Rust-like ribbons run down my face
a trail of tears once gone by
dripping down my sunken cheeks
eternal stains
my proof of love.

The rain you sheltered from
left its imprint on me
like a road oft travelled
but less well maintained
my face bears the scars of
the years gone past

Do I resent you?
maybe
my face was never meant to be this face
my bones were meant for more
my skin is peeling off
and my joints feel mismatched
I'm really glad you're not an architect!
maybe
If you didn't bring life to me
If I were still strewn across a thousand lands
Then I wouldn't know the taste of rain
So well it burns my tongue.

But I know for sure - for I have seen
your care, your love, your loss, your growth
all the things you had to hide
all the things you never lost
I've seen them all -
So I know for sure
That you and I
we weren't built to last.

How you managed to find a groom...
I'll never know.
How your child came out so beautiful...

I know it's because my spirit protected her.

We've both grown old
haven't we?
Our bones croak the same tired tune.
At least it serves as a lullaby
for the baby who cries when thunder strikes.
If I time it right, I open my windows
when she opens her eyes
and I let the wind tickle her face.

Such a cute thing. The little one.
You used to be like that you know?
No wrinkles marking the times you've frowned.
But we're the same, you and I
My joints ache just the same when it rains.

So don't be sad. Don't make that face.
We're both far too old to care this much.
Such greed doesn't benefit por por like us.
We half-sheltered our child
protected her from the falling rocks
the upturned trees and unkempt roofs.
Mangkhut really didn't like us much.

Don't be sad that I'm not here now.
I was never built to last.
I'm sorry I lied
I shouldn't have lied -
But you my dear
My friend, my lover, my pride
You were built to last.

To understand some things
is not as easy as some people make out.
It is easy to know something like
RIVER is RIVER
or
VILLAGE is VILLAGE

But it harder to understand how
RIVER has VILLAGE
Or whether it is plausible to say that
VILLAGE is RIVER

RIVER has VILLAGE
is easier to comprehend -
the first people who formed the village
sprung from the river (the waterfall), afterall
But how do you comprehend
VILLAGE is RIVER?

Does it make sense to say that
RIVER has FISH
and
FISH is LIFE
that
VILLAGE takes FISH

so
VILLAGE has LIFE and RIVER? (or is it VILLAGE has LIFE has RIVER?)

VILLAGE has PEOPLE
But how are we to understand
the relationship between these people
and the river?

VILLAGE has LIFE has RIVER
and
VILLAGE has PEOPLE
so

PEOPLE have LIFE has RIVER
but does that mean
RIVER has PEOPLE? (RIVER has LIFE and FISH)

VILLAGE has PEOPLE and PEOPLE take FISH
FISH is LIFE
PEOPLE have LIFE have RIVER?)

We arrive at this FULL CIRCLE of LIFE
It isn't easy (though, in retrospect, it isn't hard either).

A drowned incense stick at Waterfall Bay

Since I was born, I was warned
that water and fire don't mix
I was careful not to let drops of drowsiness
Dampen my body's sacred purpose
I proved myself to be a bright
Outstanding lad
The Chosen One
on the head of the luminous snake

Slithering, quivering, the dragon and my siblings
wowed the crowds - like lagoons swooning
that night in a full moon, a sparkling ballroom -
Tides of admirers come and go
Talking not of Michelangelo – but of our glow!

Our sedan bearers arrived at Waterfall Bay – AND BETRAYED
us to the boisterous ocean
Dipped us into the refrigerated soya sauce
Extinguished our pride to stale dumplings
A fallen angel of forgotten fragrance

Drowning with the sediment of history,
here I am with villagers, photographers and fisher folk
far from the cling-clong crowd that clutched the clocks
caprioling between trains, burning our heads off.
I thought water was my biggest enemy
But as I drown I realize it's my destiny.

go lower,
even lower than my
embrace of
temperance
where You will
find Your
peace.

behind and under my
relinquished flow are
age-old cycles and
underlying depths that
linger long enough to
consume our souls.
interlaced with flavours
only known to You
who shared a taste of my
unpungent
essence.

hold onto me like
lost tracks and
broken treasures
that You
kept
behind Your
tempted lips.

when the last of our
collective selves,
forgets our tongues,
I will vanish.
resonance
declines.
but yet,
every thing
seems to go into the
conscious arms of
gentle streams, into
our falling heads.

behind and under my
relinquished flow are
the people who
lived,
and lived
from what
remains of my
still, yet moving
figure.