

MY SHORT STORIES Vol3



C. K. YAP

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Introduction

THANK you for picking up volume 3 of my short stories, available free. It's a lot shorter than the epic v2, \$1.²² but more personal and engaging than v1. In it I imagine Papua New Guinea -a place I always wanted to visit; get off my chest gospel I recently learned; and share a few nuggets from my journey with provisional schizophrenia.

C. K. Yap

Petaling Jaya

(March 2023)

The Honey Pot

ONCE a woman had a honey pot. It was brown and roughly fashioned on the outside but on the inside, it was pearly smooth. It had a round lid and a small loop handle whereupon to stow the wooden dipper.

Because she loved their honey jar, she proposed her husband get a hive started in their back yard. So one day he did, and in the fall it was time for the harvest.

The bees had been visiting white clover, meaning the honey was creamy and light-colored with a slight sugary crunch. They drizzled it over sunflower spread on lightly toasted wholewheat bread for breakfast.

Now the woman's husband had a business associate by the name of Floss de Bunn, from Papua, amid the spice isles. Together, they had been operating a small tourist retreat on a remote volcanic lake high in the mountains where the air was cool.

One morning, Floss visited with good news. The Papuan chiefs had embraced their operation on the lip of the giant crater and blessed it. They admired the way the boat plane skimmed the surface of the lake like a pelican, and loved the tourists who gave them western clothes and electronic gadgets. And they were ready to talk business.

On his head, Floss wore a diadem of woven tropical leaves and dried insects -a "round of bees", so he was told by the natives (work hard, the chiefs had advised). There was one for her husband too, who put it on, very pleased.

The next week, the woman and her husband got on a flight to Darwin where a smaller plane waited to ferry them to the Papuan interior. He quit his job at the newspaper to

go full time into tourism and was considering a move to the crater itself which they dubbed the Honey Spot.

The light turboprop with white and blue trim seated 12 passengers and had pivoting wings that allowed it to land and take off short. As it flew over the forest, climbing, over the dwarf tree ferns and stumpy mountain palms, the couple held hands across the aisle.

Floss de Bunn was waiting by the lake side where hired tribes people were extending the jetty. They could see him tracking the plane with his binoculars and waving animatedly to his staff.

Night fell over the Papuan highlands. In the kitchen, native chefs had prepared a small feast. There was breadfruit beer and fresh grilled lake fish as well as Papuan wild rice, with a selection of raw herb from the surrounding brush.

It was a pity they somehow had no desserts, said Floss, handing out bitter Belgian dark chocolate to the chiefs

and their families. After 4 days, they flew home to pack for the move.

On the way, they discussed what to bring along. Two bags each, said her husband -that was all they were allowed. Which meant she would have to leave the bulky honey pot behind if she wanted to live at their new Honey Spot. What shall we do for breakfast? She wondered.

Back home, her husband busily sorted through their documents. He gave away her honey jar, with its creamy white clover, to a neighbor, along with the hive in their back yard.

Meanwhile, she had put together a selection of outfits that were suitable for the climate. She also secreted some white clover flowers in his round of bees, together with a young queen. She would have her honey as her husband had his business, pot or not.

Over the next couple of months, construction on the lakeside guest house was completed and the floating jetty

too. A few newly-built wooden boats were moored off the gently bobbing drums and planks and on the other side of the crater, a small clump of hive boxes on stilts within a clearing of white clover.

Life was never dull at the Honey Spot. Motley guests came and went regularly and the 12 rooms were always fully booked.

Floss taught her how to fly the Pelican and they harvested the crunchy honey early in the morning, rowing across the crater while the bees were out and the deep-sapphire lake was most tranquil.

Then one summer, her husband received word that the tribe's headman was ill. And the old chief wondered if there was anything the boss-men who channeled in so much money and entertainment could do.

She asked if honey or white clover might make a difference. And they told her to bring some. Meanwhile, Floss, who was in Darwin, would fly in a small medical team.

They brewed the clover flower tea, sweetening it with some of their honey and gave it to the headman. He smiled with gratitude, more probably from the attention he was receiving and the sweet-tasting exotic beverage. It began to look like he might recover his strength. So he told them of his vision.

* * *

In the fading light of evening, he squinted at the giant water-filled crater panning by below as the Pelican made its approach. He saw smoke coming from the bee hives, then noticed they were on fire, the jetty broken and the guest house roof crushed.

Floss landed the plane and taxied to the ruined pier. He and the team of doctors waded to the lake shore, met by a gang of pierced and tattooed Papuan youths holding

automatic weapons. Where were his friends? He asked. Where was the chief?

But bubbles and vapor were rising from the lake which was being stabbed by sudden bursts of driving rain. Gusts of wind bent the palm trees over and fanned the flames consuming the hives and the clover. Lightning seared the gloomy sky as they were marched steadily down the mountainside to where jeeps waited on the gentler shoulders of the range.

* * *

The woman and her husband held each other in the back of the 4-wheel-drive. So much for big dreams, she whispered in his ear. He conceded silently, wearing a chief's round of bees. And she parted her hair to reveal the fresh tribal tattoos on her cheeks and forehead. Because you love

Papua, they could hear the old headman again, Papua gave
you these *-worth more than all your gold.*

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Made for Running

HIS compact laptop ran Ubuntu Linux. Upgraded with the latest 6.2 kernel debs. His feet ran Kiprun KD500 II shoes with energy-returning Pebax foam. He made a living combining both, online.

Called Leg-Logz, his Android app hooked up people who wanted company on their runs. Maybe to talk shop or current affairs as they worked off the pounds. On one such run, he met someone who sold him the world.

You know the Kingdom of God is overlaid the Earth, said the balding jogger who was simply called Paul, but men do not see it. What do you think of that?

Quantum physics? He ventured.

Paul laughed. No, guess again.

There are angels everywhere.

Of course, said his jogging partner, but what it really means is that the teachings of God are a secret hidden in plain view. The purloined letter was left in a waste paper basket. And a secret just means it's too intimate to read out loud so people are afraid.

He wanted to reach out and rub Paul's balding head but the jogger turned into a side lane abruptly. See you next week, he called back.

The next time they hooked up, it was raining, and the two men huddled in a pedestrian underpass tunnel under the highway staring out across the wind swept downtown project blocks.

Are you going up? Asked Paul.

Most probably not.

Why not?

He shrugged.

Don't quite believe, do you? Teased Paul.

You know you have a body. But you don't know you have a soul -much less a spirit!

A house is not built for no reason. It's because people need somewhere to live, because one day, man came down from out of trees and decided to build the Tower of Babel on the plain of Samaria. Think about it.

The rain poured down and they found themselves standing at either end of the tunnel. Awkward silence as if too much had been said. I'm off this way, called Paul, stepping into the curtain of falling drops.

He was afraid to lose his knowledgeable friend who was telling him these absolute truths, the keys to the world - the ones that ultimately mattered, so he asked Paul to explain via mobile chat.

There is a god of Hell as well as a god of Heaven, came the reply. Then a long pause.

We are saved not *because* it's a "free gift" or because of the divine "sacrifice" but more accurately because there are mechanisms we don't perceive normally. Machinations of evil countered by machinations of good. Moses the murderer would have been taken to Sheol if the Devil had his way. So would David the adulterer. But God thought better of it.

The key to salvation is behavior that pleases the Lord. In *that* sense, yes -there is grace.

He wanted to ask Paul a hundred and one other questions but the next day, the balding angel of wisdom mysteriously disappeared from his contacts.

He issued a notice from his app, asking users if anyone had ever run with a balding Christian man called Paul and what it was like.

Did he touch you too? Came one indignant reply. He deserved to be run over. He died in a road accident, said

another. Not a good man. He was a school teacher accused of sexually molesting his pupils.

He discovered that Paul's real name was Bruce Jamban and he taught high school moral education.

A woman's desire is 7 times that of a man. This is because a man has to give her all 7 signs he loves her to which she has only one reply: I am your slave. It was his favorite line until one day, a girl protested.

There followed a struggle along the busy road in front of the school and Bruce shoved the girl to safety, getting hit himself. He died in hospital after 3 days fighting for his life.

He found out that the outspoken teacher had passed on a week before their first run together.

Why did his soul come to me? He asked God. And he fell asleep wondering.

Later that week, he was out on a run with a lady friend he hooked up with via Leg-Logz. Tanned, with long

straight hair and the body of an athlete. They jogged to the council cemetery, laid out across a rolling field of neat grass.

The rows of headstones were alphabetically ordered as much as possible and it took him just 10 minutes to find the teacher's grave.

Bruce's headstone was cracked and scored with lewd graffiti. They looked at one another and she nodded as if to say, I believe you.

But the ground being soggy with rain, the sides of Bruce Jamban's grave began to sink.

They stepped back as the Earth swallowed the vandalized headstone. They could see his coffin surrounded by a pool of muddy water, floating up to the surface with its lid ajar.

At the foot of the case, a pair of running shoes from Decathlon. There was no body.

The newspapers and social media had a field day with his report. "Outspoken Teacher Innocent?" asked the

Straits Times. “Poof of the Resurrection” declared the Catholic Voice. #AngelJogger trended on Twitter.

He went running with his lady friend more because she was beautiful. One day, as they jogged through the underpass below the highway, they stopped to kiss in the privacy of the tunnel.

He thought he saw Paul, or Bruce, whichever he preferred, standing by the opening, watching them, in a corner of his eye, and the wise angel was smiling. But the warm embrace and loving touches of his girlfriend drew him back, -isn't that just the way of this world?

*** For the Kingdom of God is overlaid the Earth but men do not see it ***

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I Material

MY assistant and I sit either side of the subject in the periphery of her vision. We begin by taking turns asking her random questions, provocative yet relevant to our personalities. Then, the subject is blindfolded. Now rotating spatially around her, we use our gathered cues to “speak together”. Where a cue fails to initiate simultaneous conversation, we keep it alive by bouncing it between ourselves until the subject vocalizes spontaneously again.

-”Merging the Mind”, Steinbart Frankel PhD

I am. I exist. Is there a “therefore” somewhere? No. The mind is MATERIAL and “I” is the cut. “Therefore” does not hold the cloth together. Rather it is “I can”.

Shelly sat in the back of the classroom with her notepad out and her pen clicked ready. Beneath her tortoiseshell rims and soft lashes, her large dark eyes doodled sordid fantasies over the other attendees’ faces.

I can. I do. Is there a “so” in between? Or a “but” as in “but I won’t”? Can and do are feelings. Feelings are the hems and seams of the mind. Can-do is the payoff, otherwise all emotions eventually turn negative. When a person is negative, he does not learn.

There was a break in the seminar by the eminent NIMH psychologist, Steinhart Frankel. At the coffee dispenser, Shelly met a slender young man. She giggled inwardly as they shook hands. He was very solidly yet economically built, dressed in a white, long-sleeved turtleneck. He introduced himself as Igor Bistro.

How long have you known Dr. Frankel?

Have you mogrified your aspects? He asked.

Just today and no, -not yet, Shelly replied.

Then who are you, -do you want to know?

Shelly bit her lip. Pushing 40. I work as a storyboard artist. And I'm not really that fat...

She tipped her head over her left shoulder, spilling it with a cascade of tousled hair.

Igor noticed.

28, part time model, he said, men's (no ladies') underwear.

He handed her a calling card that looked like Michelangelo's ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

The Frankel.Stein's welcome you to our heart, it read. Shelly turned it over and there was a 6-digit code to patch through / unlock an operator.

ALL sex is okay, not all LOVE. This is rhetorical, of course. Go think about it, urged Frankel.

After the seminar ended, in the evening, Shelly and her friends went out to the Kaleidoscope, a psychedelic restaurant uptown. She wanted to unwind from all the mind-blowing info she had absorbed that morning.

Fill us in on what's going on with Dr. "Frankenstein", one friend said.

Shelly shook her head, it's nothing much.

I did get his card though... she trailed off, flicking the piece of stiff paper between her fingers.

You should call him, said her other friend.

After several rounds of fermented kombucha tea, Shelly plucked up the courage to dial the operator. She read her the code and said,

Give me Dr. Steinhart Frankel.

Shelly? Came the psychologists urbane countertenor, so glad you took the time to call.

What made you come see us this morning?

I'm lost on and off, she replied. Sometimes I don't know who I am.

And who am I?

You're Dr. F- oh, sorry. I guess you'd be...

Don't be sorry-

...the wisest man I know, they said it together.

Shelly and Dr. Frankel laughed and it seemed like they had bonded.

Call me anytime you like, the kindly old psychologist hung up. She noticed the varioptical code on the card had changed.

So who is this "Igor" person?

A model...

Is he in love with you?

Shelly just smiled.

You came on to him?

What's his number?

Shelly used the card again and got through to Igor Bistro. It was like playing a very interesting board game.

Shelly. How are you?

Fine if not totally inebriated, she paused to down her 4th kombucha.

I see... and how's the inner little girl? I noticed her this morning.

How did you know?

Why did you tilt your head after such a confident statement?

Why- oh...

What does it mean? They spoke together.

Shelly's friends laughed.

Give us that card.

They held it up to the light, flexed it as if it contained some magic microchip.

Frankenstein, Igor, Shelly -you're all in a secret conspiracy of some sort. They teased, dragging on the waterpipe they were sharing.

Shelly just shrugged.

*** maybe they were just jealous ***

ALL sex is okay, not all LOVE.

Her friends took the card from her and tore it into tiny pieces.

What does it smell like?

Vanilla cheesecake.

They fed the torn fragments into the waterpipe burner.

Smoke rings blow from across the disco

-“Hell Yes”, Beck

Shelly stumbled home. Unlocking the door of her apartment, she leaned against it hard, slipping down to the

floor. There was blood on her thigh where she had scratched a 6-digit number with her nails.

Talk about being “I” material, she smirked.

Can-do, came the disembodied voice of Steinhart Frankel, over the transmitting haze of alcohol.

Shelly used the code, just one last time. She thought about it -for a second, then requested Igor’s phone.

Hello? answered the model, sounding distant and unsure.

Do you believe in destiny? She fought back her tears.

As isn’t there always a right time and place for everything?

I think I just crossed that line tonight. I’m bleeding, Igor -because of you.

Then what would that little girl say?

Marry me, they spoke together.

... falling in love, Steinhart Frankel PhD pronounced the blessing, falling in love is just another step to the

enormous plan of God. Love so precious that you'd believe it comes by only once a lifetime.

Now don't be afraid of it, -nor be indifferent to it as we all think of others through *ourselves* and ourselves through others. For in love, is true peace and in it...

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About the Author



CHENKUANG YAP was born in Canberra in 1976. He lives in tropical Malaysia. Besides writing short stories, Yap also codes Python apps. A baptized Christadelphian, he believes in the brotherhood of all faiths. Follow him on Twitter @Brotheryap