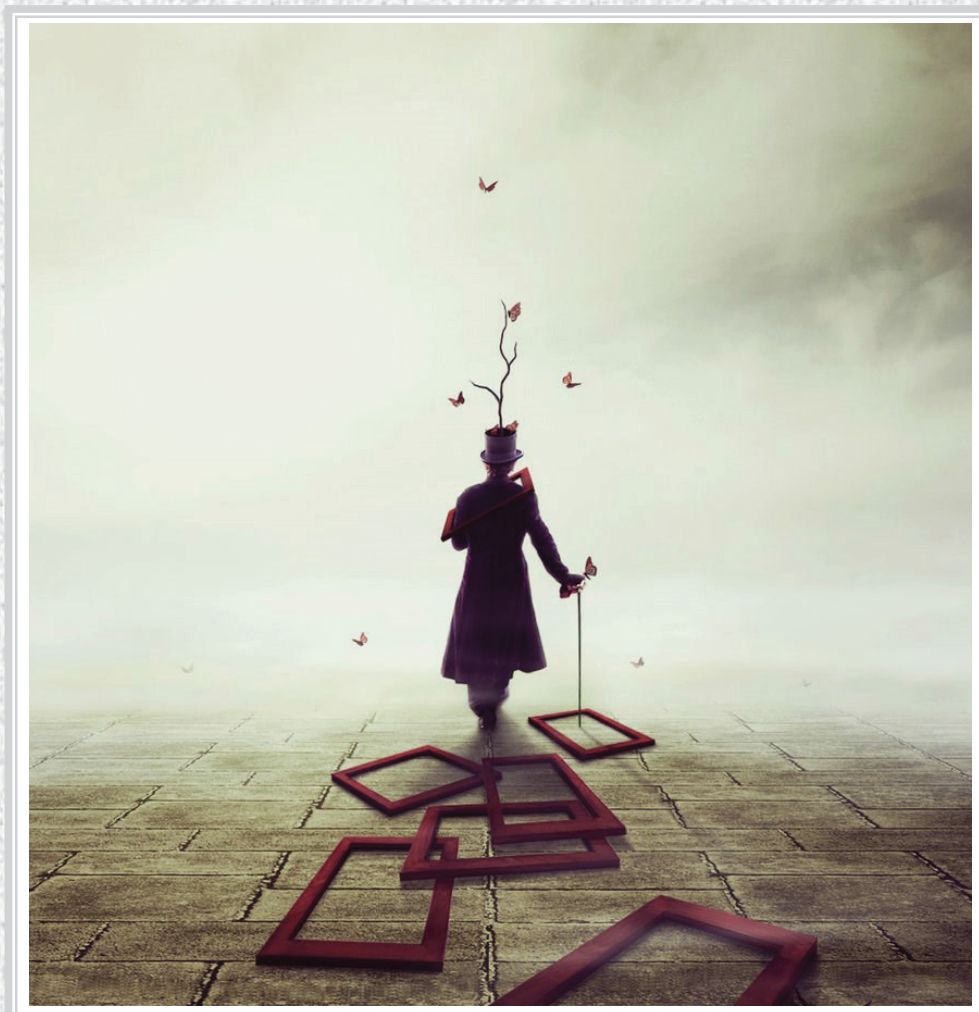


River Poets Journal 2015 Special Edition Sliding Doors/Parallel Lives



Artist's Block by Norvz Austria

**A Collection of Poems,
Prose, Memoir and Art**

2015 Volume 9 Issue 1

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Norz Austria

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A Journal of Poetry, Prose, and Art



Embryo by Norz Austria

Day 12 by Ho Cheung Lee

July 20 (Day 12, end of journey)

Dear Diary,

I had a weird dream last night, finding myself embraced by the cold current. I looked up and met the formless moon, filtered by the obscure water...Perhaps I dressed the chill with me the entire day.

The trip comes to an end and we are looking forward to our flight home tomorrow morning. The first eleven days we had here did not turn out to be too fruitful, except for the West End show which thrilled Oliver. What was planned was not achieved. But today Oliver started to quit thinking about himself being Joseph Meech living in Stirling. At least he seems to have started giving up that thought.

I woke him up at around eight this morning. He told me he found this hotel too small and housing too many guest insects. I told him this was the best one in Bridge of Allan already, and muted him. While he was shifting and struggling out of his unconsciousness, I cleared the leaflets on the desk in front of the mirror. The materials on castles and museums did not yield good memories from this 12-year-old at all. In the mirror, I was looking at a man probably a few years older than how he should look. White streaks had become more prominent suddenly. Perhaps this spiritual journey aged people. I promised myself this was the only time I would bring him here.

“Dad, where are we going?” Oliver spoke with his blocked voice. His hair was a bird’s nest in its collapsed form.

“I think we ought to visit the university,” I responded.

“But Joseph wasn’t a good student,” Oliver replied before a yawn. “University was not his thing.”

I thought it was even better that we visit places with which he would not associate. I began to find the idea of reincarnation ridiculous myself. Perhaps I should have listened to his mother. Anyway, since the boy talked about his past life as a young man living in Stirling, I should not skip the only university here, which was built in the 60s. I told him that it would be our last station. The next morning we would fly back home. He agreed.

We headed east after leaving the hotel. It took us merely fifteen minutes on foot to reach the institute. On the way, I checked his folder again. It held scribbles and drawings done by the boy since he was four. He could not even understand his own works sometimes, but there were several obvious references to a bridge of some sort. So I paid extra attention to bridges, modern and old looking. And I picked the Bridge of Allan as the place for us to stay. Yet nothing had rung the bell yet, which might be a good thing. I preferred Oliver to be Oliver. I preferred my son to be mine, totally and completely.

The morning air was clean with the flavour of fresh leaves. The summer rays shone on my face as a kiss of welcome. Oliver was humming and jumping all the way, until he saw the huge sign ahead which read “The University of Stirling”, with its school shield next to the words.

“Boy?” I asked, staring at his pale face.

Day 12 by Ho Cheung Lee

Oliver stopped, looking intensively at the sign, then its surroundings. He pondered. And he pulled his legs to start a frantic run, as if a tsunami was behind him.

“Hey!” I yelled. And there was no response or turning back from the sprinting child. But I was not too concerned because I thought he was just being playful and that was all. He made a left turn, fifty metres ahead of me, and entered the university premises. I made no move to race with him and I followed at my own pace, expecting to meet him when I made my left turn. But when I reached the corner, I knew this time was different. He seldom disappeared. This time he had.

The entrance was a wide path for vehicles, although there were pedestrians on both sides. The heavy foliage was dazzling. There was a mild slope going all the way up. A couple of young people were in front of me, carrying plastic bags from a supermarket. But the boy was nowhere to be seen. There was a campus map a few steps ahead and I was attracted to it.

The university was built around the Airthrey Loch. Separated by the lake were the academic buildings and the residential buildings. And more than obvious, there was a bridge to link the two worlds. I had a feeling where my son had gone. I took a quick picture of the map with my cell phone and pushed myself forward, neglecting the modern constructions which would otherwise have got my attention. The path branched out into several smaller ones at the platform where the slope ended. The road sign guided me to where I should be heading. I made a full-circle turn to make sure Oliver was not around, and started towards the linking bridge.

I found myself accelerating steadily. My heartbeat went up with my breath, as if the two rhythms were engaged in an increasingly rigorous conversation. I suddenly remembered how Oliver had shocked his mother and me when he first called himself, or at least what sounded like, *Joseph Meech*, when he was four, and said that he lived in a town called *Stirling*. His mum and I had fun searching for the source of information which caused him to say things like that. But the fun started to become worry as time went by and we both failed to locate such a place.

His many stories floated up as I made heavy steps along the stone path covered with leaves and twigs. He wrote notes and drew pictures about Joseph’s life. He used ‘I’ when describing Joseph’s experiences. I found that it was not a wrong use of pronoun or a role-playing game when his English started to have a touch of the Scottish flavour. He convinced me, several times, that he *was* in fact Joseph, despite the opposite views held by my friends, as well as his mother.

I scared away a few ducks on the path as I began to half run. My arms swung so wide that a few pages from the folder I was holding fell off. I stopped, panting. As I was picking up the pieces, each image from the collection made an impact in my heart, like mini blows. I saw Oliver showing me pictures of his friends at Stirling, the bridge that he said he used to walk across every day, his house, his playground and so much more. I continued to sprint, remembering his eyes as he told me how Joseph entered the dark and stopped seeing anything. I imagined a young lad talking to himself at the centre of a bridge above water. He saw his own shattered look as he leaned over the edge. And he understood that was his last reflection.

The bridge was then a few steps ahead. I saw it stretching over to the other side. The lake was a huge body of water like a pair of wide spread butterfly wings with the slim bridge as her body. I ran to hit the wood boards of the bridge’s floor. There were only two people visible as I came to a halt. *Where the heck is Oliver?*

Day 12 by Ho Cheung Lee

I went to the centre of the bridge and I was at the centre of the loch. The water surface was slightly wrinkled as playful birds disturbed it. The milky sky paled the lake further. I leaned over one side but saw no reflection of myself. My head was drawn downwards as if a pair of yearning eyes was staring at me from down below. An inner voice told me I should go lower. I pushed myself further out. My belly was balancing my horizontal body on the thick cement edge and my feet lifted up from the boards. And there was a drawing in which the man was in mid-air between the water and a bridge. He drew it three times, until I stopped him from doing it. But each time it was more detailed than the last. I saw *him* in me, this very moment. *Is that Oliver, or Joseph? What am I doing here? Why did Meech come to me? Am I to look for the answer in this very water?*

I felt my balance begin to go off, just as a voice intruded my blasted mind.

“Dad!” an angel’s voice broke in. “What are you doing here?”

My feet came back down and I found myself sweating like hell. “Where on earth have you been?” I asked with so much anger and confusion.

“I just hid myself at the bushes and followed you all the way.”

“You...” I grabbed his shoulders tighter than ever.

“I thought you knew I was following...”

I pulled him close and forced a kiss on his forehead, with a gentle smack on his cheek. I shook my head and looked at both ends of the bridge. The boy gave me a puzzled look and I returned with a smile of relief.

“Is this the bridge where Joseph Meech used to...” I asked calmly.

“No,” Oliver interrupted. “I don’t think so.”

We both stood there for another minute without saying much. And I took him to the other side for lunch. I started to feel hungry after my near dive. But the boy did not want any food at all, and declined to talk about his past life even when I started the topic. He had never behaved this way these twelve days, or these eight years.

I had an eventless afternoon with the boy back at the hotel room, watching popcorn movies. We then chatted about the sites we had visited, looking at the pictures we had taken. Towards the evening, he was eager to pack with me. It seemed that he wanted to leave the place more than I did. I asked him whether he would like to carry his folder by himself. To my astonishment, he asked if we could discard it. Of course I was more than delighted, tearing the drawings and forgetting about his abnormal visions. He had never shown his willingness to give up Joseph Meech. This seemed to be a good restart.

There, Oliver slept with audible breathing coming through the whispering ventilation. He shifted to one side and I pulled the blanket to cover his bare shoulder. I took off my glasses and smudged the scene. The moving vehicles outside became no different from moving boats on the dark waters. I turned my head to check him again, the lying child camouflaged with the abstract beddings in different shades of brown. I wish he will never have my dreams.