





## 冬令時間－鄭華珠

離開香港之前，家人送了一隻手錶給我，啡色皮帶配上淡金色錶框，錶面窄長，款色典雅，錶上有兩個時鐘，方便經常旅行的人士可隨時查看兩地時間。弟弟把手錶拿給我的時候，帶點不好意思地說，他不知道香港跟多倫多相差十二小時，剛好一個對倒，當錶行職員幫他調教時間時，他才赫然發現兩地剛好差了一個白晝。我說不用擔心，等到冬天，過了冬令時間後，兩地相差十三小時，這手錶來得剛好。我笑中帶淚地把手錶戴上，環看四周，媽媽依舊忙碌的來回廚房與飯桌，變出一桌豐盛；平日沉默的父親，來來回回詢問行李與機票的細節，就怕我們有何閃失；弟弟生動地說他們在錶行找到這舊式手錶的故事，讓這驪歌帶笑；我把臉埋在碗筷之中，拼命把熟悉的味道擠進身體。

那是我在香港的最後一夜，錶上的兩個時鐘同步。

剛來到多倫多的時候，正值夏天，陽光燦爛，草地畝畝，大家也珍惜轉眼即逝的夏季，公園草地滿是人潮。有時我會準備好晚飯，帶一張野餐墊，到附近的公園，邊吃邊看，看小孩追逐小狗，看人們玩飛碟，看樹葉漸漸泛黃。九月開始轉涼，緩緩步入冬季，日照時間趨短，街上慢慢變得肅條。我還記得踏入冬令時間的那天，一覺醒來，發現手機顯示的時間跟客廳的大鐘不符，就似時間凝結了，感覺便似賺多了一小時。但借來的總有限時，待夏令時間，便作歸還。我打著呵欠，把手錶的上方的時候調慢一小時，兩地不再同步。

工作的地方在城市的另一端，天剛破曉，便要出門。正值隆冬，我把自己埋藏在厚厚的羽絨之中，風從冷帽的縫隙中襲來，頭顱一陣寒顫，露出的皮膚冷得刺痛。等待巴士的時候，呵氣成煙，然後才發現某些巴士站裝有暖燈，按下暖燈的按鈕，巴士站上方便散發一圈暖光，紅中帶黃，仿如一顆小太陽，但暖光有時盡，十來分鐘後便會熄滅，要再次按下按鈕，才能讓暖燈再次運作。低頭看着手錶，是香港的日落，又是這兒的日出。我把手錶上方的時鐘調教成多倫多的時間；下方則是香港的時間，就像我在乘搭飛機時，在雲層之上凝看下方，尋找香港的形狀。

我的父親也是移民，他年輕的時候橫越大海，來到曾是漁村的城市。那時候沒有一技之長的年輕人，大多從事體力勞動的工作，他亦不例外，當了多年廚師，每日在火爐旁揮灑汗水，是勞累卻踏實的生活。父親寡言，平常在家，一臉嚴肅，鮮有談笑，在沙發一角架上金絲眼鏡，細細看報，或是在看老舊的電視劇集，他最常看武俠世界的電視劇，特別是把金庸的小說改編而成的，總是把同一套劇一看再看，我猜他看的不只是恩怨情仇，而是看一串回憶，熟悉而心安。

小時候翻閱相簿，看見父親年輕的樣子，我內心嚇了一跳，照片中的他只有廿來歲，穿著恤衫，騎著單車，燦笑而來，笑得一臉輕快，眼中有著對未來的期盼。那時無知的我，才赫然發現，原來父母也曾年輕過，並非生下來便是「父母」的模樣。自此，我在腦中便刻上他年輕時的笑容，有時看著他金絲眼鏡旁的白髮，不能把當年朝氣勃勃的他，跟眼前的他連繫上，忍不住猜想他經歷了什麼風雨，才換來他眉眼間的木然死寂。



我是家中長女，母親總嚷著父親溺愛著我，當年他們並不餘裕，父親卻為嬰孩的我，添置種種，毫不手軟。她每次說起，也帶一絲苦澀，也許當時他們的日子太難過，養育小孩不只是有光鮮的一面。可惜的是我對嬰孩時期的歡笑沒有回憶，記憶所及，父親

便是寡言沉默的存在。近年唯一一次我窺見父親的輕快笑容，是我們一家在京都旅行，人在遠遊，脫離了日常，嘗到美食，他笑得開懷，眼中帶著滿足與好奇，如同小孩到了遊樂場般雀躍。

人在異地，日子總有起有伏，勞累的一天過後，我乘地鐵回家，發呆看著窗外，日落時分，晚霞在地下隧道間穿插，在鏡面的反射中，看見自己眼角有似曾相識的死寂。當把一切抽走，才發現原來以往的舒適，是父母默默替我掃走生活碎石，磨走自身稜角所換來的。以為自身早已不是小孩，縱有風雨，也可抵擋一二；卻不知以往的一切挫折，也有他

們相伴，潤物無聲，讓我不致失足遇溺。當我也離開了家鄉，跟年輕的父親身影重疊，才知道那時年輕的他們，在異地獨力照顧三個小孩，是多麼的磨人。

有時我想問他，假如你可以再選，你會否到他鄉闖蕩。

我開始下廚，嘗試復刻兒時味道。縱然父親當了多年廚師，卻不愛走進家中廚房，也許是物以罕為貴，我特別記得他煮過的菜式，嚐起來就是帶點不一樣。最記得的是週日早上，大家還在睡夢之中，有時他便會準備白粥小菜。把米淘洗乾淨，添上粗鹽與油，揉搓後靜待三十分鐘，水滾下米，放兩片薑，偶爾拿湯勺往鍋底打圈以防沾黏，米隨水流翻滾，爆成米花，小火熬成白粥，便可準備小菜。每次必然是這三款：蒜蓉炒豆角、豆豉鯪魚及菜甫炒蛋，缺一不可。有時蒜蓉及蛋香在睡夢中襲來，便知是這是白粥小菜的清晨。

在他鄉，豆豉鯪魚易得，豆角菜甫難求。然而，在冬日，跟父親的步驟，熬一鍋小粥，看室內裹了一抹輕煙，瞬間把我拉回遠方小島，仿似未曾離開。

## **Winter Solstice – Jessica Cheng**

Before leaving Hong Kong, my family presented me with a watch. It had a brown-colored strap paired with a light gold watch frame, showcasing a narrow and elegant face with two clocks. This dual functionality was particularly convenient for frequent travelers, allowing them to easily track time in two distinct locations. When my younger brother handed me the watch, somewhat sheepishly, he admitted he didn't realize Hong Kong and Toronto had a twelve-hour time difference, perfectly opposite each other. It was only when the watch store staff adjusted the time that he realized the two places were exactly twelve hours apart. I reassured him, saying when daylight saving set in during winter, the two locations would be thirteen hours apart. I put on the watch with a smile tinged with tears, looked around, and saw my mother still busy shuttling between the kitchen and the dining table, creating a sumptuous feast. My usually silent father repeatedly inquired about the details of my luggage and tickets, fearing any mishaps in my travel. My brother animatedly shared the story of how they found this vintage watch

at the store, bringing laughter to the atmosphere. I buried my face in the bowl and tried to savor the familiar flavors.

It was my last night in Hong Kong, and the two clocks on the watch synchronized.

Upon arriving in Toronto, I was greeted by the warmth of summer – bright sunshine, lush green grass, and bustling parks filled with people savoring the fleeting season. Occasionally, I would prepare dinner, bring a picnic blanket, and head to the nearby park. There, I would enjoy my meal while observing children chasing dogs, people playing frisbee, and leaves slowly transitioning into their autumn colors. As September arrived, the cooling temperatures signaled the gradual shift into winter. Daylight hours shortened, and the once lively streets gradually quieted down. I vividly recall the day we transitioned into wintertime. Upon waking up, I noticed my phone displaying a time different from the large clock in the living room. It felt as if time had momentarily frozen, granting me an extra hour. However, borrowed time always has its limits, and when summer returned, it needed to be repaid. With a yawn, I adjusted the top clock on my watch backward by an hour, and just like that, the synchronization of the two locations was lost.

My workplace was on the other side of the city, and I had to leave my house at the break of dawn. In the midst of winter, I bundled myself in thick down, shielding against the biting cold wind that seeped through the gaps in my hat, causing my exposed skin to tingle. While standing at the bus stop, my breath transformed into vapor, and it was then that I noticed certain stops were adorned with warm lights. Upon pressing the button, a comforting glow, tinged with red and a touch of yellow, would radiate in a circular pattern above the bus stop, resembling a small sun. However, this warmth occasionally waned, and after approximately ten minutes, it would extinguish. Pressing the button again was necessary to make the warm light operate once more. I looked down at my watch, capturing the sunset in Hong Kong and the sunrise here. I adjusted the top clock to Toronto time and the bottom to Hong Kong time, reminiscent of when I peered down from an airplane above the clouds, seeking the familiar contours of Hong Kong below.

My father was also an immigrant. In his youth, he embarked on a journey across the ocean and arrived in a city that had evolved from a humble fishing village. During those early days, youths lacking special skills often found themselves immersed in physical labor, and my father was no exception. For numerous years, he toiled as a chef, his days marked by the rhythmic sweat at the stove – a tiring but stable existence. My father was reserved; at home, he wore a serious expression, rarely smiling. In a corner of the sofa, he would don gold-rimmed glasses, carefully reading the newspaper or watching old TV series. His favorite genre was martial arts dramas, particularly those adapted from Jin Yong's novels. He would frequently revisit the same series, leading me to speculate that his interest went beyond mere entertainment; rather, he seemed to be reliving a tapestry of memories, finding solace in the familiar and comforting narratives.



As a child, flipping through photo albums and seeing my father's young self-startled me. In the pictures, he was in his early twenties, wearing a shirt, riding a bicycle with a radiant smile that exuded lightness and optimism for the future. In my naive youth, it dawned on me that my parents weren't always the embodiment of "parents." This realization etched his youthful smile firmly into my memory. Sometimes, looking at the white hair beside his gold-rimmed glasses, I couldn't connect the lively him from the past with the stoic demeanor before me. I couldn't help but wonder what storms he had weathered to bring about the silent solitude between his brows.

Being the eldest daughter in my family, my mother always claimed that my father spoiled me. They were not well-off when I was born, yet my father spared no expense in providing for me when I was an infant. Each time she recounted this; a trace of bitterness lingered in her words. Perhaps their circumstances were challenging, and the journey of raising a child wasn't always illuminated by the brighter aspects of life. Unfortunately, I have no memories of the laughter from my infancy. As far as I can remember, my father was a quiet and reserved presence. Freed from the routines of daily life and indulging in delightful cuisines, he erupted into hearty laughter. His eyes reflected a blend of satisfaction and curiosity, akin to a child enthralled in an amusement park. It was a moment that painted a vivid picture of a side of him I had rarely witnessed before.

Residing in a different place introduces its share of highs and lows. At the end of a tiring day, I find myself on the subway, gazing out the window, lost in contemplation. As the sun sets, its rays intertwine with the underground tunnels, casting a twilight glow. In the reflective surfaces, a familiar, serene stillness catches my eye. When everything is stripped away, I arrive at a profound realization. The comfort I once took for granted was the result of my parents quietly sweeping away the debris of life, smoothing their own edges in the process. In assuming I've outgrown the need for protection, I failed to recognize that their silent support had been steadfast, shielding me from the tempests I thought I could weather alone. It dawns on me how challenging it must have been for them to independently nurture three young children in a foreign land. The understanding deepens, weaving a tapestry of shared struggles and untold sacrifices.

Sometimes, I want to ask my father, if given the choice again, would he embark on the same journey in a distant land.

I started to cook, attempting to recreate the flavors of my childhood. Although my father toiled as a chef for many years, he rarely stepped into the kitchen at home. Perhaps rarity adds value. I vividly recall the dishes he prepared, and they always had a slightly different taste. What stands out the most is Sunday mornings when everyone still lingered in the realm of dreams. On these occasions, he would prepare plain congee with side dishes. Starting by thoroughly washing the rice, he'd add coarse salt

and oil, knead it, and let it sit for thirty minutes. Boiling water would then be poured over the rice, with two slices of ginger added. Occasionally, he'd stir the bottom of the pot in circles to prevent sticking, allowing the rice to dance with the water and blossom into rice flowers. Simmering on low heat, it transformed into plain congee, ready for the accompanying side dishes.

He would wash the rice thoroughly, add coarse salt and oil, knead it, and let it sit for thirty minutes. After boiling water, he would pour it over the rice, add two slices of ginger, occasionally stir the bottom of the pot in circles to prevent sticking, and let the rice roll with the water, exploding into rice flowers. Simmering on low heat, it would turn into plain congee, ready for the side dishes. Without fail, these three dishes were always on the table: garlic-stir-fried string beans, fermented black bean mackerel, and shredded cabbage stir-fried with eggs. Any one of them was indispensable. Sometimes, the aroma of garlic and eggs would drift into my dreams, letting me know it was the morning of plain congee with side dishes. Without fail, three dishes graced the table: garlic-stir-fried string beans, fermented black bean mackerel, and shredded cabbage stir-fried with eggs. Each one was indispensable. At times, the enticing aroma of garlic and eggs would permeate my dreams, signaling the morning of plain congee with side dishes.

In a foreign land, mackerel with fermented black beans is easily accessible, but string beans and shredded cabbage are hard to come by. However, when winter arrives and I follow in my father's footsteps, simmering a pot of plain congee and witnessing a light mist enveloping the room, I am instantly transported back to a distant island. It feels as if I never left.