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## **Am I the Ying or Yang of this Relationship**

*Anna Bradley*

I believe that I became friends with Chyanne Wright thanks to a much higher power than the whims of a coincidence. We were in the same science class in seventh grade, and even though our last names were on opposite ends of the alphabet, we ended up next to each other in the age of assigned seats. I'd known from my other classes with her that she loved to draw, and it wasn't long before I recognized one of the characters she was working on during class. It was from a video game, *Super Mario Galaxy*, to be exact, and I spoke up, already over the moon that I'd found something in common with a classmate I'd looked up to for a year.

We'd met for the first time in our sixth-grade P.E. and math classes. Chyanne sat close enough to me that I could see her notes, and they were always covered in doodles. This is what she called her drawings—doodles—but to me they were all pieces of art, from the simplest sketch of a face, real or fiction, to complicated masterpieces of fantastical creatures, all drawn right there in class.

We didn't sit side by side until that fateful day, and even then, I wasn't sure if I was going to say anything. It took me three tries to get the words out of my open mouth, and when I finally did speak, my stomach started flipping so many times that I stopped in the middle of my sentence. But Chyanne gave me a smile so bright that it scared away all my doubts. We exchanged numbers and texted each other nonstop about our favorite fictional characters. After Chy, as I quickly christened her, learned how passionate I was about storytelling, she recommended I play the game that would soon become one of my favorites: *Super Paper Mario*. I played through the story in a matter of days, immersing myself into the world so much that I couldn't help but cry when I reached the bittersweet end.

That story was all I could talk about for weeks, and when we found that our time together at school wasn't enough, we developed a routine after Chy suggested I download Skype. We video-chatted for hours after school multiple times a week to work on our homework together. When Chyanne finished her work, or when I grew bored of mine, we stopped studying world

history and started studying the art of storytelling. Chy and I filled pages upon pages with stories, mine told through words, hers through pictures, and we feared nothing, not even the intimidation the blank paper presented.

Chyanne convinced me to create an account and start uploading my stories to an art-sharing website she'd joined at the beginning of the year. To celebrate this advance in our careers, the two of us upgraded from traditional mediums to digital ones. Chy received her first laptop and drawing tablet, and I begged for a wireless keyboard so that I could sit and type in any position I wanted. My favorite was to lie on my stomach on the floor of my bedroom while Chyanne frequently sat at the desk in her parent's spare bedroom with her feet propped up on a second chair.

If you type in our old usernames today, you can still see the results of two passionate seventh-graders using their gifts to create new worlds every day. To practice our crafts, I started writing scenes involving her characters, and she would draw mine for me. The stories we wanted to tell were so similar, inspired by the same things, that we began to work together on them. Everything clicked when we worked together; we covered every plot hole, looked over each minor detail, and filled the gaps that sat open in our stories. Chy listened to every one of my ideas, even the terrible ones, and I started looking up to her like a flower looking to the sun. For my worst ideas, she helped me dissect them and salvage the best parts; for my worst grades, she helped me create a study schedule and kept me on task when we worked together. We spent an entire year this way, crafting stories over texts or Skype calls and playing as many Nintendo games as possible in person. But nothing, not even our perfect world, could last forever. After only a quarter of the way through eighth grade, Chyanne's father lost his job, forcing him to move from a small town in Indiana to an even smaller one in South Dakota, half a country away. It might as well have been another planet.

Her last day attending the same school as me was the last day of class before our fall break. While everyone else celebrated the last bell of the day, I met Chy at her locker and pressed my lips together, willing myself not to cry. She handed me a box of tissues and a piece of paper I couldn't even look at. If I had, I would've burst into tears in the middle of the hallway. We hugged goodbye, and that was that. Chy had more people she wanted to say goodbye

to before she left, so I walked to my bus alone. I got off at my stop alone. I cried in my bathroom alone behind the locked door, and when I thought I had my emotions under control, I walked downstairs to hear my mom ask how my day at school went, and I broke down all over again. I didn't look at the picture Chyanne had given me until later that evening when I saw the notification that she'd posted a new piece online. Before pulling up her art page, I grabbed the paper and box of tissues from my backpack. Chy had drawn two video game characters for me, and at the bottom, in her own handwriting, Chy wrote, "Anna—I can honestly say school wouldn't have been as bearable without you. You support every art piece or fangirlism. Thank you for that." I hung the picture on my wall, where it still sits to this day, and wiped away the fresh tears with her gifted tissue box.

It was hard at first not seeing each other in person every day, but over the next year, her move strengthened our friendship. I continued to talk to Chy every day, even when the rest of her friends from before the move stopped replying. I asked her about new friends she was making, new classes she was taking, and she told me how South Dakota's academic standards couldn't compete with Indiana's. I laughed, asking how she would manage in a less intellectually stimulating school. Chy was, and still is, the type of student to always finish her work early, settle for nothing less than an A, and never quit until every teacher in the school knew she loved learning more than any of her classmates.

When she moved, we continued our Skype conversations, but she talked less, studied more. When she did talk, it was usually about how nervous she was to be a freshman, even though she, as an eighth-grader, already took some of her advanced classes at the high school. When in doubt, I always told Chy that she was smarter than half the kids at that school. On a good week, she'd smile and concede my point. On every other week, she'd point to her grades and let whatever letter appeared on her report card define her.

Nevertheless, she persisted, and we graduated middle school 750 miles apart. I closed the gap over that summer, flying by myself to South Dakota to spend a week at Chyanne's house. When we weren't swimming in her backyard pool or watching anime, we were glued to the soft brown couch in her basement playing video games. That couch was the kind where each seat reclined on its own, and I was over the moon to find out that it had survived the move. That

couch had been my bed the first time I'd spent the night at Chy's house in Indiana, and I wouldn't have wanted to sit anywhere else as we played through Super Paper Mario, start to finish, in only a handful of days. I cried when we reached the ending, and even though I'd warned Chy that it would happen, she still laughed when she saw the tears glistening in my eyes. It wasn't a mocking laugh, rather a warm one that brought a smile to my face.

For two days out of the week, we took a trip to the Mall of America in Minnesota. We picked this destination over visiting Mount Rushmore—my reason was to spend a day shopping at America's largest mall, but Chyanne wanted to go to the indoor amusement park. Her wish won the first day, so for almost six hours, she pulled me along onto the tallest rides, the fastest, and the ones that turned upside down so many times I couldn't tell right from left anymore. But on the second day, Chy let me drag her around to at least poke our heads inside every store in the mall. She never once protested, not when I tried on dresses I had no hope of affording, not when I marched to Claire's on the hunt for new jewelry. Even though Chy balked at the amount of purple and pink glitter the store threw in her face, she found up a friendship necklace right away that she thought would be perfect for us.

The necklace was one of those that split into two magnetic pieces on two separate chains, but instead of a rainbow heart, as was the trend when we were in middle school, this necklace formed the yin and yang symbol. Chyanne, ever the better student, explained to me the basic characteristics of the yin and the yang, the former being emotional, passive, and introverted with the latter being more stoic, assertive, and extroverted. At the time, it was clear that I would take home the black yin piece while Chy wore the white yang piece. At the time, the analogy perfectly summed up our relationship, and at the time, our two halves made a whole, we completed each other, and our world was in balance.

I knew of the yin and yang from my seventh-grade world history class, but all I could remember was that the symbol originated in China and is closely connected with Daoism. I faithfully wore my yin necklace for years until it was tragically stolen from me in the high school gym locker room. Now, almost five years after first purchasing that necklace, I finally took it upon myself to research the symbol I had let define me for years. Right away, I realized this search wouldn't give me a concrete answer on whether I was the yin or yang of my friendship with Chyanne;

Robin R. Wang, the Director of Asian Pacific Studies at Loyola Marymount University, stated in a journal on international philosophy that “the study of Daoism is a complicated field that challenges our conceptual interpretations and understanding” (2010, p. 243). In my suburban middle school, Daoism had been simplified and written off as mostly unimportant for seventh-grade curriculum; even the name had been changed to read easier. Traditionally, the word is spelled “Taoism,” but the “T” still sounds like a “D,” hence the change to Daoism, which today is considered a correct spelling.

I learned about Daoism alongside Confucianism, and together my teacher presented them as religions or philosophies that began in ancient China. In the simplest terms possible, Daoism is about being in harmony with the Dao, or the Way. The *Tao Te Ching*, by Lao Tzu, a sort of Bible for Daoism, describes the ideas of Daoism through over eighty short poems. The second poem, as translated by Stephen Mitchell, describes how:

Being and non-being create each other.

Difficult and easy support each other.

Long and short define each other.

High and low depend on each other.

Before and after follow each other.

The theme of balance is already at play in the text, which is what Chyanne explained to me in the middle of Claire’s; the Way is balanced, the yin and yang balance each other, and Chy and I had strengths to compliment the other’s weaknesses.

Thanks to my world history courses in middle and high school, I had been under the impression that Daoism was nothing but an ancient idea. To prove me wrong, Lai Chi-Tim in an article titled “Daoism in China Today, 1980-2002” writes that “Daoism has remained a central part of the daily life of the Chinese people.” Chi-Tim continues to describe how, after the Cultural Revolution, the National Daoist Association re-established itself in 1980 with the goal of restoring historic Daoist temples, opening them to the public, and receiving government approval to protect them nationally as religious centers. The religion is still relevant today in Asia, even though my previous history courses taught me otherwise. While this was all helpful for me to understand the context behind Daoism, I could not

find the words yin or yang stated explicitly in Mitchell's translation of Tao Te Ching.

When describing Chinese cosmogony, or the study of the origin, Charles Williams, the author of multiple textbooks on Chinese art and writing, explains, "The yin and yang are the negative and positive principles of universal life, and are pictorially represented by the symbol

...the dark and light colours distinguishing the two principles". This text explains yin and yang in the same manner that Chyanne did: yin is the dark, emotional half compared to the light, extroverted yang.

Little did I know that the yin and yang had more applications than simply explaining that light cannot exist without darkness, and vice versa. In the introduction to his textbook devoted to the symbol, Robin Wang explains that the symbol has been oversimplified due to its ease of recognition: "Because yin and yang are the most commonly known concepts from Chinese philosophy, they have practically become English words themselves" (2012, p. 1). To further his point, many students who can't remember every detail they learned in their seventh-grade world history class forget that "yang" doesn't rhyme with "sang," rather "song." Wang continues to explain how the symbol relates to Daoism's teachings:

Second, yinyang offers a normative model with balance, harmony, and sustainability as ideals. When one compares something to yin or yang, this usually suggests a way of dealing with things through the balance or harmony between two elements. Such advice is popularly applied to almost all fields of action: leadership, business, art, media, sports, and psychoanalysis.

There was the explanation I needed to understand what it meant to be the yin of my friendship. I brought my softer, passive, emotional personality to the table, and Chyanne balanced it out with her assertive, blunter way of acting. I brought my wild ideas, soaring with my head in the clouds, and Chy balanced me by remaining grounded, offering her rational thoughts to counter mine. It was with this perfect blend of give and take, push and pull, that we wrote thousands of words and drew hundreds of pictures. I wore my black yin necklace as a constant reminder of my role in this relationship; as Tao Te Ching describes,

Know the white,

Yet keep to the black;

Be a pattern for the world.

If you are a pattern for the world,

The Tao will be strong inside you

And there will be nothing you can't do.

I want to end the story here, with Chy and I drawing and writing every single day, always improving, always working in harmony, but humanity is not that perfect.

The next time we saw each other in person, she came back to Indiana for a week. All the tension of a long-distance relationship melted away for those seven days. As per tradition, we played through Super Paper Mario, this time at my house, and even though over a year had passed, I still cried at the end. Listening to the music, reading the dialogue as Chy defeated the final boss with nothing but muscle memory, the ending transported me back to when we didn't worry about anything but our next piece of the story we were both still writing.

Both of us grew up to be chronic worriers in high school. We worried about the weather and our grades and college and our future majors and jobs and everything else we could come up with. Around the same time that she began to draw into herself, I started to reach out. I found relief from my worrying externally while she sought solace internally. I didn't realize until it was too late, but she'd begun building walls I didn't know how to break down.

I hit the first wall the second semester of our junior year. We continued to discuss our stories, but her plot grew darker, her ending more bitter than sweet, until she stopped wanting to talk about her story altogether. Every day when I arrived home from school, I sent her a message hoping she'd had a better day than yesterday, but if it was worse, I'd be there waiting if she wanted to talk about it.

She almost never wanted to talk about it. Instead, she asked me to tell her everything that went on in my day. My messages grew longer as hers shortened, sometimes only responding with an emoji instead of actual words. I tried to ask her what she wanted to talk about, how she was doing, how her story was coming along, but the more I showed I cared about her, the less she cared.

We began going days without speaking. Maybe because our schoolwork grew more demanding, maybe because we were both losing our muses, she drew less, and I wrote less. I still



looked up to her as the yang to my yin, the sun to my moon, even when her messages, when they finally did arrive, gave no excuse as to where she'd been or why she never wanted to talk anymore.

Chyanne visited me in person the summer before our senior year. The trip wasn't even for me, but since she was staying in a hotel in our hometown, she took a few hours out of her day to sit with me in Starbucks. Chy looked exactly the same as I'd remembered; her hair was even the same length. She was only in town to tour Ball State, a university she didn't end up attending. I didn't know it at the time, but that would be the last time I'd see her again in person. Inspired by our reunion, however brief, I spent a few days that summer replaying Super Paper Mario yet again, this time, all alone. Even after all those years, the ending still hadn't lost its magic; I still shed a few tears when the ending sequence started.

Mario's goal in the game is to stop the villain, Count Bleck, from using an ancient spell known as The Void to destroy everything in existence. Mario receives help from a human-turned-butterfly nicknamed Tippi who acts as a guide and sidekick. Throughout the game, the player receives hints as to who Tippi and Count Bleck were before the events of the story. It isn't until the final battle that the game reveals their identities as Timpani, a human in the Tribe of Light, and Lord Blumiere, a ruler of the Tribe of Darkness. These two tribes were never living in harmony, yet Timpani and Blumiere fell in love. Before their plan to run away to a world where they could live together in peace came to fruition, Timpani received a curse for attempting to dilute the bloodline of the Tribe of Darkness, leading Blumiere to believe her dead. Blumiere, blinded by the loss of his love, had set out to destroy everything that had taken away Timpani by using The Void. When the two reunite at the end, he realizes that their separation was temporary instead of permanent like he'd been led to believe. To stop the spell, the two must sacrifice themselves just moments after they found each other, after they believed they could live happily ever after. At the end of the credits, a silhouette of the two on a grassy hill covers the screen, along with the words "The End" and a simple music-box melody called "Memory." It always manages to move me to tears.

The end of my friendship with Chyanne brought me back to the very first time I'd finished the game. I'd cried for Blumiere and Timpani's tragedy, their selflessness, and their

hope at the very end that even though they'd given up everything else, they still had each other. When my other half, the yang to my yin, severed the bond completely, I cried for my own tragedy, but unlike with my favorite game, I saw no hope after the credits. I stopped enjoying writing because I saw her in every word. When I tried cutting her out of what was left of my fractured world, I watched my creation crumble to pieces.

Accompanying the sudden silence in my head, the loneliness that gripped my heart and wouldn't let go, was a new fear I'd never faced before, not with Chy at my side. Without her to support my never-ending ideas, I grew to fear the blank page, the blinking cursor, and the possibility that I'd never create anything as beautiful as I'd written before Chyanne denied me access to our shared world.

I wanted to throw all of my writing, all of my characters, my worlds, my ideas, into a Void that could take them away. But I didn't have a Void. All I had were my thoughts, my keyboard, and a yang-shaped hole beside my yin. The change didn't happen overnight, but I kept writing, and the more I did, the more I learned to enjoy the process again. When I stopped wishing for the past, I looked around at my present and found the hope after the credits. At the time, I couldn't put the feeling into words, but I found the description in Wang's writing:

Because of this dependence on context, a single thing can be yin in one way and yang in another.... These are not contradictory labels, and it would be absurd to argue whether the right hand is really yang or really yin. The qualities only make sense when one specifies a certain context. The fact that anything is simultaneously yin and yang mirrors the fact that things are always implicated in multiple relations at once.

There it is: I may be wasting my time trying to argue whether I'm really the yin or yang. In the context of my life, I exhibit qualities of both. But perhaps more importantly, because I don't have to define myself as just the yin or yang of my relationship with Chyanne, I also don't have to rely on her to complete me.

There are still pieces of my writing that I can point to and see her in immediately. I don't think that will ever fade like the pain of her leaving did, but at the same time, I don't want it to. If you realize that all things change, there is nothing you will try to hold on to.

If you aren't afraid of dying,  
there is nothing you can't achieve.  
Trying to control the future  
is like trying to take the master carpenter's place.  
When you handle the master carpenter's tools,  
chances are that you'll cut yourself.