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Writing Sample

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From *hyperlinkage*, "hyperlinkage", "The Voice", "Camera Lucida", "Mrs. T. Contemplates Divorce", "Mrs. T. Prepa res Fruit", "Mrs. T. Mends Clothes", "To-Do List", "Frangipani", and "The Forward-Projection of a Revival". From *Light*. "glass elevator", "Leaping", "Gongs, Alarms", "Mentakab", "Richmond Hill", and "Hedge Fund Managers"

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TSE Hao Gang**From *hyperlinkage*****hyperlinkage**

There is only one rule in hyperlinkage, to wit, you do not refer to yourself. Keeping that in mind in this paradise of cut-and-paste is an endless deferral. This is a poem, not a website. Outside it is raining.

Your words are always blue and underlined, not the blue of an eye nor an atmosphere. This freedom—now any word may be a sign for any thing—disturbs me. I weary of traversing Edens. Contractions.

I stroll through the nearby garden (sky's another shade of blue now), I book a reading room in the library, I wonder when our paths will next fork towards each other. My *novels* talk to each other, making essays.

Who can speak in hyperlink?
I can only say a name, sometimes sounding like the ozone breeze post-pour, sometimes like a knife wound, furtive, again, like a touch typist alone in a room, again, again, and again.

The Voice

Closing time,
Apologetic ushers.
(Outside)
Thin moonfinger
On old sleet,
Evanescent
Bone on bone.
I am allowed to see.
(Only because)
Head down, fumbling
Jacket zip. Stuck.
Fat Mammon,
Neon god, kept
At bay as Nature
Does sidewalk
Like Newman
Did MOMA.

Try whispering,
Dear Newman.
Silences can be
Terribly loud—
Lunula lunulae, oh,
(Do you not see)
In between 5th
And 6th aves
Stretches, off-
White, infinity.
A long-lost lover
Craving touch.
(Ah yes I see)
You made the
Entire world
Parentheses.

Another kind of
God lives
(Outside)
Our glassy museum.
Thin moonfinger
On old sleet,
Evanescent
Bone on bone.
Old Newman
Did MOMA

As Nature
Does sidewalk
As this creature
(Brightest linen)
Is doing
Life, languid,
Flesh of flesh,
Itself.

Camera Lucida

There are no
lights—only pale
reflections that
point inwards.

A subtle twist of
fingers and images
accumulate like
merit in my mind.

This black box—
second skin, third
eye, fourth wall—
is a kind of loss.

Mrs. T. Contemplates Divorce

Gone.

And then you were here, nonchalant
smile on your lips, making dinner.

Swear to God you must have been
a figment of the imagination,
a most subtle conquerer.

You left your spectacles on the
cistern, that old, old, trope.

You knew best how to insinuate your
presence—everyone eats and shits,
after all—and it appears that Freud
the pervert was right, right, right.

Ingenious how you dealt
with that last foetid bastion—
sex—there, wrote it, you made me
feel you by its absence as my body
lay on fresh sheets and
you tossed the sofa cushions aside
to make space.

But there is more than one hole, and
out of another symbols are
dropping like milk teeth into cupped hands.
Their weight and your laundry got
too heavy to bear. Did what could be done,
bought a new dryer, place is
practically a 3 star hotel.

You took a leaf from Kerouac anyway, tortured
look in your eyes—your spectacles?
next to the faucet—and
you were deleted like so many
lines of bad poetry. Tried to search
for your remnants (never been a
good writer) and found only a heapful
of cushions, a wrinkle in the
sofa, and a book you left
for me that I'd
already read.

Mrs. T. Prepares Fruit

Here are three peaches
in a row, three wombs
softly handled, tickled under
running water.

Here are three bone porcelain
dishes, three tiny silver spoons,
three whispered names,
three chances.

I remember Kristeva:
now that's a woman who can
appreciate a sweet peach and a cold
glass of milk.

I cast the stones like die or
scrying bones. Not headed
for the compost heap, not
if I can help it.

The impertinence of peaches,
living on after being eaten clean.
There will be strawberries
tomorrow, perhaps.

Mrs. T. Mends Clothes

Greek legends tell of the Fates, Ur-goddesses whose cosmic purpose in life is pretty much the same as mine—mending clothes. It comforts me to know that these crones existed in the public consciousness of a great civilisation,

although they did not give women the vote, you can't have everything after all, and maybe in the debate between that and public volition the latter suffers slightly. No matter: when there is a button that needs replacing I select the appropriately-

coloured spool and unspool, reflecting fondly upon Clotho, industrious link between distaff and spindle, sometimes called the Ninth by Romans because of the whole pregnancy-equals-to-new beginnings metaphor. I don't make buttons, but

when I measure out the required length of string I turn to Lachesis, who probably is a sombre, stern governess with knuckle-ready ruler and annoying habit of standing in the middle of things. I want to get over the image of her as quickly as

possible, so I move on to the taste of the thread instead—it's much easier to bite than cut, but would madam Atropos mind? The manner of death is no mere formality, remember, and after a brief struggle with the needle I remember to thank my

lucky stars—factory worker Clotho, who showed me how to balance employment and childcare, schoolteacher Lachesis, who told me of the gravity of the sea and the importance of words, imperious aristocrat Atropos, who reminded me to always go

out in style. Look, you cannot tell where my hands and eyes have been, the shirt is good as new; now it's time to turn to my sisters—I subject myself to the philosophy of menial domestic chores—replace me well, for sewing is hard work and I am tired.

To-Do List

What appointments for the day?
Pause—check off the to-do list—
before it's quickly washed away.

The drone in a suit is helping to relay
a message for his boss that consists
of all appointments for the day.

A housewife scrubs the floor. Clay
footprint—son's boot—resists
before it's quickly washed away.

The soldier's still too young to say
what sex he had, what lips he kissed.
What appointments for the day

will make the girl at the parapet stay?
She tears, obscures the morning mist
before it's quickly washed away.

A half-formed child will never play
pretend. It's only the size of my fist.
What appointments for the day
before it's quickly washed away?

Frangipani

grows at the
boundary of
our last
cemetery,
nightwatchman
of these
hollow fields,
where orphans,
aged, young,
keep on.

“Two four
six eight,
who do we
appreciate?”

Years of
taking child-like
chant and
making flowers
of it have
made the
frangipani
well known.

It stands
for desire,
fragrance, a
warning—
“it is Donne,”
one might say
knowingly.

And when
the rain
comes, it
weeps petals
back into
the earth.

Who can bear
to see the
frangipani tree?

I am but
a man, and
a sort of
stillborn, too.

Hide me
here then,
frangipani,
make this
place a home.

The Forward-Projection of a Revival

Changi beach is
a low pressure zone
this Easter.

An important man reminds
everyone to
smile. A cold wind
insinuates
itself between
cloth and skin. Palm trees fray
in the distance.
What a dichotomy of over and
under. Technically,
waist deep means
half-way there.

[. . .]

It's over. Someone
says something
indistinct.
I shed
the optical illusion of
tepid salt water.
Molecules of air
all correct
and accounted for. Amidst
the lapping waves
I detect
the sound of clouds colliding.

From *Deeds of Light***glass elevator**

at 7.25 a.m. each day except weekends you (rolled magazine under left arm) take the elevator (cheap coffee in right hand) up (most mon & thu in creased cream blouse, alternate wed in pencil skirt & glasses because of board meeting) to level 18 where the air is clearer (once you stared out at the hotel opposite, pretending ice-capped mountains were in view) & your office (once I missed my stop wondering about fri's agenda (I saw you had 10 files & no Vogue)) waits (on the same floor of a different building)

Leaping

His new way to be pedestrian. His sliding down the Elgin Bridge. His shirtlessness. His hypothetical retracing of pipe, ledge, railing. His discovery of dust to dry the palms. His hatred of stairwells and lifts. His arc from planter to pavement over open drain, through the winking ixora, past breathless pregnant dog, or grandpa with a pram. His private skygardens and their flowering pipes. His falls.

His ground to second floor. His a to b in a quarter minute flat. His eight hooked fingers, white against wall. His filling the void deck with desire lines. His debt to concrete. His figurative flags and planks. His rules of physics. His actual pipe, ledge, railing. His side-to-side his overhead bridge his freewheeling.

His sleeping parents. His key on a leash. His, when night is a used up tube of Darlie, his lying still, arms out, his waking dreams of leaping, of being caught.

Gongs, Alarms

I am from the high rise bomb shelter.
From the Speak Good Singlish Movement, red as plum,
where the joyful grammarian worms. I am from nameless
noodle stalls with frowny uncles, from palm copy-paste
plantations, from the ice-stoking wilds of Ontarian
suburbs. I am from the strut and peck of *hao gong ming*. I have a badge. I am from the policeman who drove
me to school, from the lawyer's letter, the leaving.

I am from muddy tea stretched to a metre and a half as we
looked for its heart, from the black nut that oozed and invited
fingers or silver spoons. I am from the *are you from China?*
I am from the gongs of Imperial China. From each love
letter of the alphabet, crisp, incandescent. I am from
Asian Values. I signed a pledge to outlaw the water vapour
stirring in air. I am from a thing that spits and spits.
I am from the itch to sugar the split.

Mentakab

Road-sick, dribbling, those in the back
ask if stopping will clear the senses,
if clearing might make the sky's slick
swell to chance

of rain. Therefore they cry. What burden
rearview drivers, what news and towns
passed to pass time, what gauze curtain
clouds thrown

through vanishing point, what blur future
memory? In the place they will end
up chafing at, there are fragile creatures
feathered, pinned,

their nests gold to the black market,
locked on the top floor. Half of me
hopes the image of those half-dark
dusty streets

is accurate. That the smell of retch
and leather is, that plates on a lazy susan
may remain, that the snick and snatch
of hokkien

keeps its unintelligible tart. Nothing
more than our quiet, than rage.
Half of me released the swiftlets straining
in their cages.

Richmond Hill

Like the rose
you flourish, your motto says, however
I never saw one all the winters I lost
trying, through thick grey air, to converse

with the big
house and each part-stranger within,
some pyrrhic victory, much like smog
smeared on tiger economies coughing

every note
of their development index anthem,
achieved in the padded basement
where the Nintendo lived, where then

we would,
repeating the same few games over
hours before patience suddenly unfolded,
origami creature, creased sharp, never

to return to
paper, flat; yet still I learned
how to fold a rose, with the snow
heaving all around big house, around

my neck
and the necks of my many cousins
who had to attend classes the very next
day, who beat me at video games.

Hedge Fund Managers

Lim's first king competes with Yuda's deadly chopster, just three chops and Lim wins easy. Later rematch ends in draw as Pisang almost takes a leg off Megaman who scampers round the glossy leaf too fast for eyes, under, and Megaman is tapping out, wispy web dangles from the end of a vein. Nowadays NParks guys will fine you for finding fighters at the reserves, even downstairs (tough!) of your estate. Yuda's Khatib stretches wide to frighten Ah Lim's medium chopster Hulk. Three limbs out, they catch reinforcements anyway, schoolboy cup of hands in the bush that often crushes precious kings. Lim will name his newest champion Dinosaur. Yuda keeps each soldier safe in separate sunlit boxes. Come Monday, Goondu and Charlie and Saruman rest; their owners, suited, assume the wary stance of spiders.
