

You Are Cow. I Am Tiger.

written by Guest Contributor | August 20, 2018



Horoscopes. I often felt their frivolousness, and the futility to defy them.

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It really started with an animal not in the Chinese zodiac: a cat.

It was the same stray haunting the lift lobby of my sister's apartment block in Shanghai, scaring her the same way all cats would just when she lived in Singapore. She would update us over the phone about her retaliation: a cacophony of sudden stomps, tscking hisses, and fake-brave shouts to send the cat into a terrorized scurry.

Early this year, arriving at her block two flights and nine hours later from Singapore to spend the Lunar New Year, she instructed me to open her letter box.

"I haven't for a long time because *it's* always there and I'm damn scared of it."

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But I was the first one that truly scared her. She was 8, I was 7. It was my first day starting primary school, and we had arranged to meet at the canteen before going home. Whatever the details were, we had missed each other.

I recall bravely waiting, confident she would show up. She, on the other hand, terrified to have lost me, burst into tears from like a child who had lost her mother in a crowd.

That evening, I received a shelling. I was *selfish*, had only cared about having a good time and must have wandered off to play with my new friends. *See how much your sister loves you? She cried because she was afraid you went missing. But you, you're not even scared. And you're not scared because you're a tiger girl*, my mother had said to me.

I feel my mother had said those words accusingly, yet I cannot ascertain it.

Aren't accusations expressed with exceptional conviction to mask some doubt? Yet, there was no doubt I am a Tiger. My inability to show fear or understand danger caused others to feel precisely what I lacked.

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Regardless of the field it ends up, a cow contents with the steadiness of grazing tabled in its schedule.

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My sister became a teacher. She had the tenacity to excel in an occupation of demanding stakeholders: over-reactive Heads and defensive colleagues embittered by parents and their demands. She was meticulous in the cycle of marking, and marking corrections, the patience of repeating the same curriculum to new students.

I became a writer and an artist.

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In secondary school, I cavorted with boys in parks and staircases, shoplifted clothing and makeup, failed Math, and panicked over missed periods. They were the traits of the week, clockwork like how as my sister went to church every Sunday.

One day, my father pulled me aside: One day we will be gone. You have to protect your sister, look at how innocent she is. You're the *clever* one.

Even as a teenager tired of excessive attention and parental precautions, I wondered: Who is going to protect me?

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What is one animal's predator is a human's prey. Surely tigers are also hunted.

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In folklores and fables, the Tiger begins sly, *seemingly* clever but in the end, the mouse, the hare, or the hunter always manages to outsmart it.

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In the clichés of a caring teacher or the nurturing older sibling, people expect my sister to be matronly.

Instead, she has dark wide eyes, a face sharpened from boniness. To hide her thin frame, she compounds herself with heavy opulent coats: boy ball blue, yeti shag, camel sleeks, shouting pink. She looks cold and rich. Untouchable.

When she speaks, her voice is clear: precise, metered as though she is too, measuring you in her message. A seizing up of.

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On the last day of my holiday, my sister ordered me a cab. It was too far and too expensive to go and come back, she said. We joked a little to keep our goodbye brief, said she was happy to get back to her routine and prepare for the next teaching week.

During my visit, I was the one to make sure the cat was nowhere when we arrived. I imagined her resigned, returning to the familiar trepidation at the lift lobby.

In leaving, I was leaving her behind. That must be what an 8-year old who loses her younger sister in a completely foreign environment feels.

In the car, I became the Cow and Tiger at once.

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Being and defying zodiacs. What a pleasure.



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