



COMMENTARIES

Five Short Stories and Two Poems: What Is it Like to Be and Animal



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A Story about Dora

By Wei Lin

My name is Dora. My ancestors appeared in the age of the dinosaurs. I am also a giant of the sea. I often appear in tropical and subtropical oceans and make my living by eating small sea creatures. Have you guessed who I am? Yes, I am a shark.

Today I would like to share a personal experience with you. I am the youngest in my family, and I am also the happiest because I have many brothers and sisters who love me, but they always disappear one after the other.

One day I was out playing with my friends and a net fell from the sky and caught my friend. She kept screaming "Help me, help me" but I didn't know what to do. I watched as the net slowly descended into the sea. I stuck my head out and saw just a few people lifting my friend out of the net and one person holding a saw. The saw was gently slicing at my friend's back and a lot of bright red blood was coming out of my friend's back. As I thought about what to do, the hateful people finally threw my friend into the sea. What surprised me was that the blue sea turned red as soon as my friend came down. When I breathed the water, it smelled strange. My friend opened her mouth as if she wanted to scream or speak, but she was probably in too much pain to make a sound. I screamed, maybe my friend heard me, she was crying and shedding tears, I thought to myself, will she just leave me? My friend slowly closed her eyes and she slowly sank. I cried bitterly and she just left me.

Later, my parents told me that people dried her fins and sold them for a high price, but I didn't understand. Don't people have their own families? Don't we share the same world? Why do they oppress us?

My Flesh of Steal

By Yujie Sun

My days as a stray were harsh, filled with uncertainty and struggle. One fateful day, my life took an unexpected turn when I was hit by a speeding vehicle. My leg shattered, and pain wracked my body as I lay on the cold pavement.

A kind human found me and took me in. The doctor mended my broken leg with a sturdy material, and soon I was running around, reveling in the joy of being part of a loving family. Life was good, filled with belly rubs, tasty treats, and the warmth of a cozy bed. But just as I started to believe in the goodness of my newfound home, tragedy struck. One day, I was taken away from the safety of my family, stolen from the warmth and security that had become my haven. I found myself in a place of unimaginable horror, surrounded by the stench of death.

The unthinkable happened—I was slaughtered, my once-mended leg now a mere commodity. My flesh was turned into dog “meat”, packaged, and sold in the market.

As someone prepared to consume what was once a living being, shock spread across his face. Embedded in the leg, he discovered a foreign object—a metal material similar to stainless steel. It was worth tons of love and thousands of euros, the material for my patella surgery. When that person posted my broken leg on social media asking if it was still edible, they had no idea I once was the apple of someone else’s eye.

A Fin Whale Living in the Mediterranean Sea

By Yating Tan

When people ask me what it's like to live in the beautiful Mediterranean, I don't think my answer is quite as satisfying as it might have been. In the cradle of the Mediterranean, where the azure waters meet the sky, I, a fin whale, live in an abyss that is both strangely wonderful and dangerous. Perhaps because of my slender and long body, I am not as popular and familiar to mankind as my good friends the sperm whales and dolphins, but people do know me and call me the Giant of the Mediterranean.

Alone, I glide through the quiet waters, enjoying the calm. With friends, we race and hunt, sharing the thrill of the chase. In the marine choir school we sing, our voices joining together in a great underwater concert. But this peaceful life is often interrupted by the buzz of human ships crisscrossing our home, turning our tranquil waters into busy highways. This place where so many ships pass is transforming the Mediterranean world we know and love, where up to 30% of the world's shipping passes through. Every summer, the surface above teems with human joy, oblivious to the shadow their delight casts on our world below.

Tragedy had struck my family. My thin sister, once healthy, vibrant and whole, now bears the mark of human haste - half her tail (fluke) missing from a careless encounter with a ship. This wound has left her unable to feed herself, and my family takes care of her. We have all whispered our joys and sorrows, and almost every week I hear the latter. Last month brought a heavy silence to our waters, we heard of the tragedy of some of our distant relatives living in Oceania, their journey ended not in the grace of the deep but in the harsh embrace of the land - they beached themselves, a mass stranding that quelled their songs forever. We face many invisible struggles, and though we are the largest animals on the planet, we are broken by despair.

Will the world ever be a good place again? Is this planet really going to get better? I hope so.

The City of Dreams

By Bonnie Olivia Leung

Ah, the United States of America, the land of the free and home of the brave... or so I've been told. I grew up in upstate New York, so maybe I did feel free once. It was a stable ranch of 30 or 40 other horses. My mom was sent away when I was still very young, and I never knew my dad; but I grew up around my brother and others who felt like brothers and sisters to me. It was like a family – or the only concept closest to family that I had ever known. Strangely, new members come and old members leave the stable very often. So, I suppose it was not like a typical family.

When I was young, we were encouraged to run a lot. I liked running and moving around, it made sense, and my body craved it. I had a lot of energy that couldn't be spent just pacing around my bedroom or walking around the grassy pastor. Oh, I felt free then; or at least much more free compared to now. Although my bedroom was basic, dark and simple, it was clean and had a lot of soft areas. Every day, we were let out into a grassy area to walk around and eat fresh grass. Every so often, the same few humans, they called themselves the "trainers," would come by and put a seat on me, lead me to an area where there are fences and a track. They would hop onto the seat and expect me to run around with their big butts on my back! What a strange thing to do, do you think? I supposed it was fun for them.

When I was still very young, I didn't understand the rules, and would wiggle and try to get the seat or the human off my back. I just wanted to tell them that I preferred to run alone. Sometimes they would hit me when I did this, so I gradually accepted the rules and didn't fight it anymore. I realized the only time I could run was if one of them came with me, with a leash or a seat, so I went along with it.

I loved running, so between the option of running with a human on your back versus no running at all, I chose to run with the humans. The trainers, although a bit bossy at times, seemed nice enough. They would brush and clean me often, and it was nice to be pampered sometimes. Although I would still prefer to be left alone in the grassy fields, I couldn't complain too much about those times, they were still some of the best memories I had.

Gradually, the trainers came less and less to me and the others, and concentrated on running with little Bella. She was very athletic ever since I remembered, and was born here about 4 years after me. Strangely, all the humans loved her and many strange humans even came to weigh and measure her periodically. Suddenly, one day she was moved away. We were curious where she went, but rumor has it that she is with a new human who loves to run very fast. I hope she gets to run on the grassy fields by herself often too.

After that, I still got to run a little every day. Every 4 or 5 days, there will be a group of little humans who come and take turns sitting on my back. I suppose they were the children of the trainers who used to run with me. They like to touch and feel the side of my face. Most of them were gentle, but a few that were not, I would intentionally wiggle more and not let them sit on my back.

On my 13th birthday was when everything changed. Early in the morning, my brother and I were kept from the group and loaded onto a transport vehicle. I remember being in the dark, and losing my balance, bumping around the walls as the truck that pulled the vehicle starts and stops erratically. It was the first time I heard the horrendous sounds of car honks and smelled the air full of dirt and exhaust. Little did I know, that day was the last day I will see a green field and have another moment of peace and quiet in my life ever.

Since then, my life is as you know it now. I'm separated from my brother in the New York City stable, and led to Central Park every morning and staying there until dark everyday. Most days, I get given a little food in the stable in the morning, and a little when we get back at night. I am hungry and tired all the time, but most of all annoyed and feeling irritated by all the sounds, lights, noises that surround me every day and night. There is no way to block it out. Even in the stable - which is small, dirty, humid and cramped - I could hear car honks and sirens through the walls. It's like a version of hell that could make me crazy one day.

Then there's the work. We're no longer allowed to run, but is forced to pull this heavy carriage along the same route through the park and on the streets many times a day. Even when there were no "customers," as my owner says, I'm expected to stand there, completely idle, with these heavy belts strapped tight all across my body. Any sudden movements would warrant a painful whip from the owner, so I try my best to not anger him.

The humans who get on the carriage always seem super cheerful and excited, but most of the time they ignore me. I get it – I do smell a little because I rarely get a clean scrub anymore, and I'm expected to poop on this hamper that follows me. Most of the time, I could see only in front of me because of these little eye patches that they put around the back of my eye. Normally, I can see about 300 degrees around me, but with these eye patches, I can barely see what's next to me anymore. When we're walking along the incredibly noisy streets with the cars honks, there were many times where I nearly got hit by one of the yellow ones. It frightened me so much that I didn't want to go on anymore, I was hungry and tired and needed water. Once, I just didn't have the energy to take another step. I had stopped on the road but my owner started whipping my back so hard that I had no choice but gather up the little energy I had and started pulling again.

I had heard that we're now in the city of dreams – yet I couldn't imagine anyone who dreams of never-ending lights, sirens, car honks, whips to the back and exhausting 12-hour work days while hungry and dehydrated. For me, this is the city of never-ending hell, and I dream of the day when I exit it, even if it means it's the day I leave my body behind.

Let's Play a Game! Guess Who I Am?

By Yuyue Sun

—Heyyy, I just got back from work, a bit overwhelmed today, so I could really use a break! Do you have some time now? Let's play a puzzle game!

—OK, the rules are quite simple. I'm going to briefly describe myself, like my appearance, my characteristics... and you can guess who I am! Hmmm, I wonder how many times you'll fail before you get the right answer.

—Oops, did I just say that I have a job? little spoiler haha, okay, without further ado, let's get started!

—First of all, I am a mammal, belonging to the order Perissodactyla and the family Equidae. Well, I'll give you some time to look up those two words, I think it helps to narrow down the field.

—Oh, too many animals in the family Equidae? Fair enough, I'll continue.

—In general, my size is quite medium compared to other species in my family. I have a short thick head, long ears, thin limbs, narrow hooves and a short mane. Our colours vary a lot, really depending on those of our parents. Huh, maybe that's bad information. It just occurred to me that there are very few independent descriptions of us in your human languages, our appearance always "exists" in comparison to that of our parents.

—Oh, you already have an idea? You think I'm a horse? Well, you have to try harder, but you are getting close. I forgot to mention that I'm domesticated, but I think I've already given away a key piece of information, let's see if you can spot it.

—Ok, I'm going to start to toot my own horn, so please bear with me, but most of my 'virtues' have been given to me by you humans, so I guess I'm not that arrogant. So, according to you, I'm patient, docile, a little tough, but not that stubborn. I inherited from my parents the traits of intelligence, sure-footedness, endurance and natural caution. I also have speed and agility. Best of all, my skin is hard and not too sensitive, and my lifespan is quite long, up to 50 years. As far as humans are concerned, the superiority of our species is reflected in our extra endurance. In general, we can carry a dead weight of up to 20% of our body weight, or about 90 kg, while a few outstanding guys can carry a live weight of up to 160 kg, impressive, right? So our strength enabled my ancestors to endure twenty years of intense servitude as pack animals for humans in the past.

—Personally, I also work in the transport industry, oh, actually the tourism industry. I transport tourists through the Grand Canyon in Colorado. Sick, right? I mean, compared to my ancestors. You know, you humans just can't live without me, I'm really proud of my ability to walk through these rugged, roadless cliffs.

—Wow, you think you have the right answer? I appreciate that confidence, so let me hear it. Wait, a donkey? Sorry, still wrong, but you almost got it. I think you'll get it in the final round.

—Well, I just can't avoid the part where I reveal my weaknesses... Well, I'll just say it, very quickly. So... I'm almost infertile, phew, that's it, I've said it. But it's not my fault, you know, it's my genes!

—Yes, yes, now you get it. Yes, you were right, I'm a mule! I'm a domestic equine hybrid, bred by humans. My dad is a donkey and my mum is a horse. We are more common than our sibling hinny, whose father is a horse and mother is a donkey, because female donkeys and female horses are more likely to mate genetically. Anyway, they are different species, so my father has 62 chromosomes while my mother has 64, making me 63, which caused my infertility. It's always been my biggest regret, you know, I really wanted to kiss my cute babies on their foreheads.

—OK, the game is over, time really does fly, eh? I think you guessed really fast, not bad. Hope you have a good time haha, got to go, my boss is calling me back to work, see you!

I Remember, I Carry

By Kedi Liu

A puddle of glistening ambrosial golden;

Hundreds of lives and creations marry,
Thousands of flights ascend;
Millions of blooms constellated.
Through the mirror of the incarnation of our lives,
The worlds of land, sky, and blooming you shall find.

Music of the blooming of flowers;
Eyeful of kaleidoscopic allure;
Ancestral instinct of caring for my kinfolks around me as they share the same
affinity back;
Gliding with the flow of this gifted earth I am part of, therefore I am;
Even those who bring me hurdles, they are no enemy, we've been living alongside
of each other for hundreds of millions of springs, we know and respect each
other's limits;
Endless appreciations anchor me here,
Do you ever ponder much, what anchors you?

I remember to join the congress of buzzing dances;
I remember to read the movements of my fellow amities;
I carry the essence of generous blooms;
I carry sweet spirited pollen to their next destinies;
I remember the wisdom of the ones before me; I remember to pass this wisdom
to the bedsides of my next kins;
I carry lives, within me, surrounding me, beyond me;
And my wings shall expand,
When the first ray of sun picks me up in the frosty morning, I shall do the same
with the elixir of blooms.

Plant a seed of calendula would you?
Flowersome terrains where my ancestors love have gone bare and rare;
Prevent a falling of a tree would you?
It's as easy as it is to contribute to it;
Read beyond the labels of your bee products would you?
It starts with you to eliminate unethical treatments to our population;
Spare a bottle of insecticide would you?
Life-baring earth is breathing frail, and the survivors are struggling to find our way
home;
Ask yourself one more question would you?
It might just flourish the strength for the efflorescence of not-so-distant lives.

A Poem about a City Mouse

By Zornitsa Tsenova Hristova

I scurry quickly down the street,
Trying to avoid the human's big flat feet,
I feel so small in this enormous city,
Where nobody finds a mouse like me pretty.

From alleyways to gutter, I roam the cold dark night,
Looking for something upon which my kids may bite,
I never take that which is not mine,
But it is difficult to feed my family of nine.

The feelings in my heart are just the same as yours,
But each time I step out, I must take my life into my paws,
As to many, you see, I am just vermin,
But the threat I pose is difficult to determine,
I sit and wait behind the fridge,
It's such a small space in which I must squidge.

Looking on as the humans prepare their meal,
Something catches my eye, wait! Is that a vegan deal?
But I don't understand for I am the same,
As those cute little farm animals they wish to save,
I watch them set traps each night for me,
Yet they won't bite honey to save a bumble bee?

I fear I will grow old and see no change,
But there must be a compromise that we can arrange,
Please see that I am no pest,
But simply a mother trying to do her best.

Life is a challenge, for those that don't have skin,
But how boring life would be if we all were akin?
There's beauty in difference,
and there's pain in ignorance,
Nature has made us all the same,
And we should not be living in shame.

Don't crush my dreams, let empathy guide,
See me as a neighbor to whom you can say hi,
For I am just a mouse with hopes to pursue,
A little mouse that wishes to roam,
And a warm place to call home.