

# THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN

A Novel

Cyril Wong

Praise for ***This Side of Heaven***

“Densely written, erotic and poetic, with unexpected twists and turns, Cyril’s narrative provides a journey into consciousness by the unconscious; full of acute, nuanced observation and crafted anecdote.”

—Sir Malcolm Jack, author of *To the Fairest Cape*

“With deceptive simplicity, the mutable voices combine in a tale both irresistible and haunting. Reading this story feels like witnessing a communion, or perhaps a vivisection, of familiar states of being.

Evocative and unforgettable.”

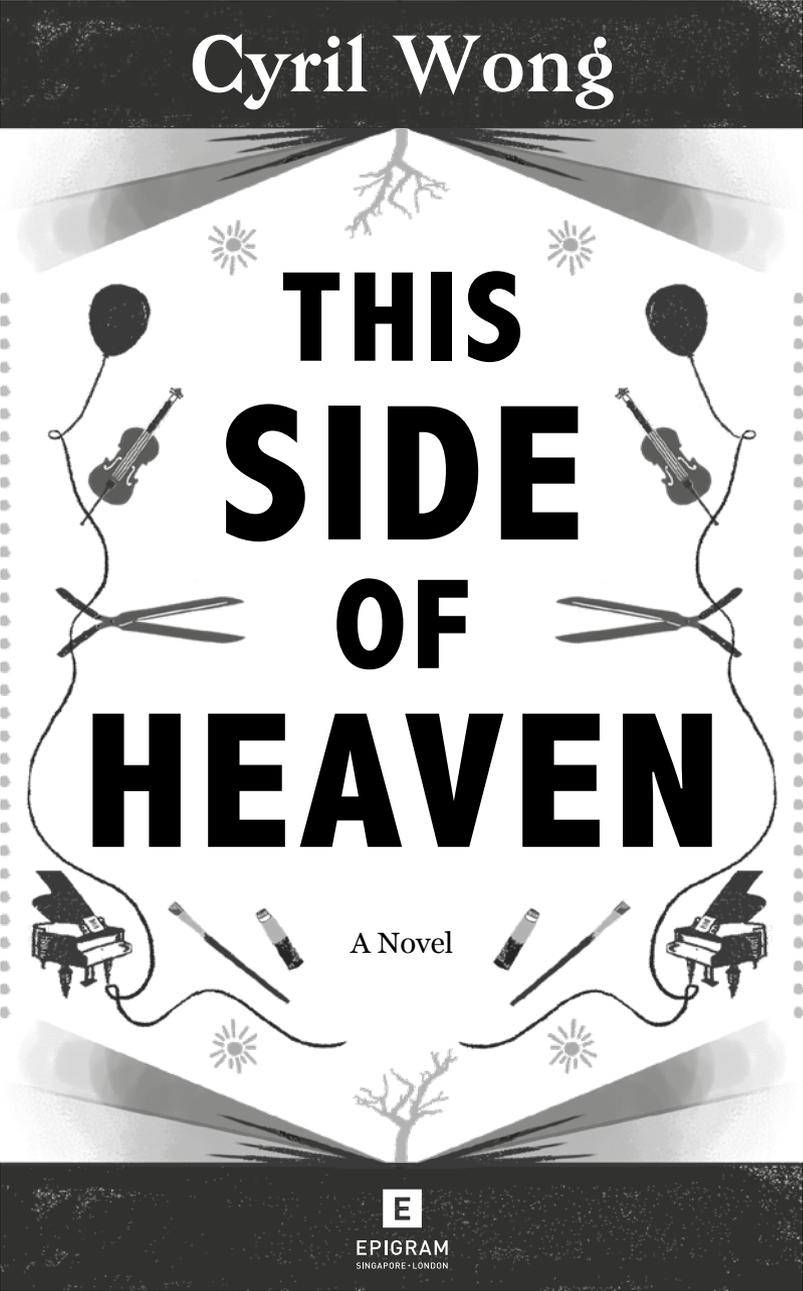
—Shubigi Rao, author of *Pulp*

“Wong pulls the rug from under us but leaves us still standing, albeit transported via his magic carpet ride to a new vantage point and offered a different perspective.”

—K.K. Seet, author of *Death Rites*

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HEAVEN**

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Also by Cyril Wong

**Fiction**

*Ten Things My Father Never Taught Me* (2014)

*The Last Lesson of Mrs de Souza* (2013)

*Let Me Tell You Something About That Night* (2009)

*The Boy With the Flower That Grew Out of His Ass* (2007)

**Poetry**

*The Lover's Inventory* (2015)

*The Dictator's Eyebrow* (2013)

*After You* (2013)

*Straw, Sticks, Brick* (2012)

*You Cannot Count Smoke* (2011)

*Satori Blues* (2011)

*Oneiros* (2010)

*Tilting Our Plates to Catch the Light* (2007)

*Like a Seed With Its Singular Purpose* (2006)

*Unmarked Treasure* (2004)

*Below: Absence* (2002)

*The End of His Orbit* (2001)

If you break off a twig, what you will learn  
Will drive what you are thinking from your head.  
—Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* (Canto XIII)

This could be Heaven or this could be Hell.  
—The Eagles, "Hotel California"

# **THE GARDEN**

## 1. THE VAGRANT

*As the living world endures a series of nuclear cataclysms, new trees sprout every day along the fringes of a garden, where more and more individuals gather over countless nights, telling and retelling their stories. Some trees vanish over time. Some trees flourish, harden and remain for an unspeakable duration, taking forever to disappear.*

In the beginning, there was the light.

Even though it was night, the light had come, blinding and all-consuming.

It is not unlike the light that comes from our sky here, if you stared up for long enough into its unnatural glow. Do you notice how our sky is never blue, just dirty white or an uneven yellow?

When the light came in the capital, nobody thought: *The end of the world!* Nobody thought, *Nuclear bomb!* I did not think about anything at all—the light took over everything.

Then the buildings were slammed to smithereens as if struck by a million wrecking balls all at once. Then the thermal radiation. Terrible, swift, searing agony; my skin burning and peeling off with such rapidity, until there was nothing left of my flesh to peel away.

It must have been what my young daughter had experienced every second of her short life. Every other hour, I had to bandage and re-bandage her little body. I had to nurse her incessant blisters. I used to pat or stroke her with gloved hands to mitigate the constant screaming. I was not able to touch her directly for fear of causing infection.

What kind of universe would create an innocent child with such a condition? What could she have done in her previous life to deserve this? *Epidermolysis bullosa*, I think the condition is called. It is funny how I am able to pronounce these words so clearly now, ever since I have come here.

We lived in a province far away from the main capital. My husband abandoned us, after gambling away much of our savings. I was left all alone to care for our poor, shrieking, afflicted child. I had run out of money from my cleaning jobs, so I could not provide the best treatment for my baby. With enough money, I could have brought her to the capital to receive better treatment. I could have paid for a bone marrow transplant that would supply stem cells producing the collagen protein her body desperately needed.

My daughter died. I was left alone. I used what little money I had left to cremate her. I poured her ashes into the river where I used to bring her when she was not in pain.

I left behind my cleaning jobs and the province to head to the capital on my own. I needed to forget my life. I needed to forget myself. I only brought two pieces of hand luggage when I got on the train. When I arrived, I decided never to work again. I would never care for myself in the same way again. I would simply survive. I would fulfil the barest demands of my ageing body.

It was cold when I reached the capital. I set up a sleeping space in the souterrain beside the railway station where I had alighted. I wrapped myself in blankets and raggedy, duvet covers that I had packed with me. I slept in the echoey silence of the brightly lit passageway. I slept in spite of blinding fluorescent lights, which were never shut off. I was not the only homeless person in the souterrain. There were other women and men who had first observed me with curiosity. When they realised that I was not a threat to their personal space and scattered belongings—open suitcases, boxes, newspapers, blankets—they left me alone.

I remember that first night in the capital, my head buried under my blankets. I dreamt of my daughter. In my dream, she did not cry or make a sound. In my dream, she was sleeping in my arms and her skin was unblemished. We were sitting beside the river where I had decanted her ashes; we held hands and sang songs as the river murmured with approval.

Oh, and on a side note, have you noticed how there are no rivers here? No lakes or ponds. No rain, either. How do the grass and those trees thrive, when this weather is unchanging?

Let me carry on. Once the capital was obliterated—I had heard rumours of a possible World War, but I had not thought that it would begin so soon, and with such an initial *bang*—

If I had known long before that the capital would be bombed, would I still have left my province? I think we all know the answer to this question.

After the capital exploded, I woke up here, on an open field under a tree just beyond the edge of the town. I checked my body for burns. My body was the same body that had left for the capital all those months ago. But I also felt lighter, more energetic. I lay down on the grass, resting the back of my head against the tree, peering up into its branches, which were oddly devoid of leaves. I gazed up into a pale, white sky.

I had the unshakeable certainty that I was no longer alive.

The blinding light, my skin burning and peeling away—I had to be dead. Because of what happened to the capital, I was here.

When I was still alive, by the time I woke up in the mornings, I would head to the nearest shopping mall to search for leftovers in the rubbish bins or from abandoned tables at the food court, keeping vigilant as I ate so that I would not be shooed away by

security guards or waiters. I would also use the restrooms in the mall to wash myself as thoroughly as I could at the public sinks.

Since I woke up in this place, I have suffered neither hunger nor thirst.

I lay there under the tree that first time I found myself here, wondering what to do next. All my belongings were gone. Not that I had much to begin with. Not that I would need my belongings anymore. There would be no more need of blankets and duvets, since I felt neither warm nor cold here. I was even filled with a deepening sense of peace, knowing that I would not want for anything anymore. I closed my eyes while under that tree. The light from the sky was bright but it was incapable of blinding me. I was also incapable of sleep. Perhaps I would never sleep again.

Suddenly I felt the grass move under my body. It startled me so sharply that I jumped to my feet. I looked down. The grass was still again. It had felt like worms were wriggling against the exposed skin of my arms and legs. I squatted down and pressed my fingers against the earth. Again, it was as if the grass caressed me, ever so slightly. I moved my hand sharply away.

Then I heard a sound coming from the tree. I pressed my palm against one of the exposed roots. I felt a faint vibration. I heard a whisper, *Mama*—

It came from deep in the ground between the tree roots.

I began to dig. I clawed and scooped. I thought my fingers would hurt. But I felt nothing. My skin did not bruise or break. I kept digging. I seemed stronger than when I had been alive. I dug out the grass and the soil. I kept digging until I had made a large hole at the base of the tree, revealing more roots uncurling underground. I heard a whimper, a snuffle. Was that my daughter?

I had not wondered if I would meet my daughter here in this afterlife. Would I find her now, under this tree?

I dug and dug. If there were tears on my cheeks, I did not feel them. I was too excited at the prospect of being united with my little girl. If I found her, we would be united forever. More and more gnarled roots rubbed against my fingers. The hole was getting deeper and larger. I was sinking into the ground.

I stopped when I saw it. I moved away more earth with my fingers to see it more clearly: the naked human leg of a child, protruding awkwardly from a deeper nest of roots jammed into the earth. The leg kicked; the tiny sole of the foot rubbed my thigh. I grabbed the shin with both hands. How could the leg belong to my daughter? It was so smooth to touch. Its skin was unmarred. No blood and no blisters. I pulled violently at that leg.

It had to belong to my daughter. It would make sense that she should be here. It made sense that she would no longer suffer from her condition, now that she was dead. I pulled and pulled. Then it occurred to me that I was pulling too hard. The whole leg could come off! I was using too much strength! I hesitated. I stopped pulling.

In that instant of hesitation, the foot stopped twitching. I was still holding onto the leg when the whole slippery limb got yanked out from my hands. The pale length of the leg slid like a panicked snake into the nest of roots and vanished. I cried out, and struck the roots with my fists. I begged the tree to return my child.

Had it been the leg of my child? Why was I so certain?

I cannot remember how long I knelt there, crying and striking the tree, the sky blazing indifferently above me. I suddenly longed for sleep, even though I was trembling with rage and sorrow.

I half-climbed out of the hole and scooped as much of the dirt that I had dug out back into the hole with me. I wanted to bury myself in the earth amid the roots of the tree. I wanted to be close to my daughter.

After some time, the earth covered my body, filling my nostrils and forcing my eyes shut. I slid my exposed hands back into the earth beside me. I curled there in the darkness. Somehow I was still able to breathe under all that soil. Somehow, in the darkness, I felt nothing pulling me into a deeper darkness. I was just a body nestled crudely underground—breathing, listening, waiting, cruelly awake. Traces of light even seeped through the earth to find me.

I surrendered. I pushed off the earth from my body. I climbed and stumbled easily out of the ground. I looked back down. The ground appeared to be untouched, as if I had not just dug into it at all. All the grass was still intact, as if I had not made any hole. I brushed off any remaining dirt from my body. I decided to move on. I walked away.

I moved towards the distant houses and entered the nearby town. I glimpsed an old, European-styled hotel, but I did not walk in. I saw houses of pale colours. I saw a little church. I saw cafés and restaurants with nobody sitting or dining inside. I stopped outside what looked like a school. From its darkened windows, it seemed abandoned. The brown, imposing building made me think about my daughter again. If my daughter had been given the chance to grow up in good health, she could have gone to a school like this.

I drifted in and found myself in a dimly lit assembly hall. There were a few people in the audience, but none of them

noticed me as I crept in. There was a man in everyday clothes on the stage, playing a slow, languorous piece of classical music that I did not recognise. It had a pleasing melody. I sat down in the near-darkness and watched the performance. I felt like weeping again, but no tears came. Before the man finished playing, I found myself standing up and leaving the hall.

I left the school building and wandered the streets in silence for a long time, before arriving here at this garden.

Just so you know, I have been here many times before now. Every time I reached the garden grounds, night would descend, as if on cue. The first time I arrived here, I immediately noticed the strange behaviour of the stars above us, scattering wildly about like frenzied children chasing each other in a vast and empty schoolyard. I saw how all the trees here had leafless branches too. I saw how this garden is shaped like a basin and right at its middle, at the bottom of the garden, a band of musicians is playing music for our enjoyment out in the open.

I have wandered these grounds many times. I have seen collections of people standing and sitting around and listening to each other talk. I wondered what they could be talking about. I had not wanted to meet or say anything to anyone. I had been a loner when I was alive and did not see why that should change, now that I was dead. At one time, standing in front of a small gathering of people, there was a completely naked man telling jokes; the whole group of listeners was laughing. What a curious performance! At that moment, I was tempted to join them in order to hear the man speak.

But something kept me close to the trees on the outer fringes of the garden and away from everybody. When the day returned,

I went back out into the town, sauntering in and out of buildings, wandering the streets, observing things and saying nothing.

Some nights, I did not return to this garden at all. Some nights, I stayed out in the open field where I had first woken up in this place. I sat by the tree where I had dug a hole. I tried to listen to its hum. I tried to hear if a child would call for me again through the exposed roots. None of that ever happened again. I just sat there, leaning against the tree and watching the stars. When the light came back, I found myself floating through the town again like a ghost.

We are all ghosts. I see that now.

I decided to come to the garden. It is always night when I come back here. So now I am here, standing and speaking sentences that I would never have been capable of speaking when I was alive, telling you about my life, about how much I miss my daughter, and wondering why she is not here with us—with me. Is being here a punishment, because I was a bad mother?

Maybe my daughter is in a better place. I hope this is true.

I look at the brighter side of things too. I will never go hungry. I will never scrounge for food again, fearing that I might get arrested. I never have to wash myself in public again. I never have to find a place to steal a few hours of sleep, since sleep is impossible here. There is nobody here to judge me for being dirty, poor, desperate and vagrant. None of you has any right to judge me now. Death is the greatest equaliser. We have all made and lived with our mistakes.

I guess I will stop talking. The only thing I can do now is listen to somebody else speak.

## 2. THE PIANIST

I guess it is my turn to say something now. But how do I follow the homeless mother with the heart and soul of a philosopher? I will sound nothing like her. Her words were so moving—and seemed so familiar!

Have I listened to her before? What is happening to my memory? I cannot even figure out why I keep coming here at night. Yet I know I have stood here before this moment, taking my turn to speak before the few of you.

So I speak again.

If I could help it, I would stay in that old school hall, playing a nearly clapped-out, upright piano in that cramped, dimly lit auditorium with slender windows. I am sure there are people in the audience—maybe one of you has even wandered in to hear me play once or twice—but I never get off the stage to look at who has come to watch me. Once my fingers touch the keys, I am lost in the music.

When night comes—the way it comes, as if the sky outside were the dirty surface of a bulb unceremoniously switched off—I make my slow way to this garden. Maybe I just need a break from playing. Day or night, have you noticed how there are not even any birds flying, resting or cooing in this whole place?

When I was child, in the garden outside the *actual* school I grew up in, there used to be white-crested laughingthrushes. I would look forward to hearing their lilting, vocal swoops and whistles outside my classroom. Sometimes I threw half-eaten nuts

out the window. I would watch the birds bend to scoop the nuts up from the ground. I loved myself in those moments, I think; watching those birds, bobbing heads ablaze with white. I loved listening to them sing.

While tinkling Schubert or Ryuichi Sakamoto, I sometimes wish I could hear those birds outside the window again. Their singing would complement my playing—my consummate melancholia—quite well. When I play, I am aware that I am nursing a perpetual sadness; massaging it tenderly through my fingers on the keys—making love to a feeling that I had only felt subliminally, when I was alive.

If I had paid attention, I suppose, I would have noticed that the sadness had always been there. Now as I make the most of a painfully untuned piano, emotion and I are in tandem—are *one*.

It does bother me—just a tad—that this version of the school hall is not the same hall I used to know. As a child, teachers would request that I play for semi-formal events or teacher-parent gatherings. That hall would always be full, whenever I performed. I would not say I was a prodigy, but I was not unlike one.

Now—inside this pale version of a past reality—there is hardly anyone to hear me. I sometimes wish that the hall is truly empty. Yet I know that they *are* there: not a full house of listeners, but intermittent strangers.

Why do they come? Who are they?

Why do you? Who are any of you?

How do you understand every word I am saying? How is it that we speak the same language? Your faces—all of you seem to come from different places—

Who am I, since I got here? Whatever recollections of that previous life—they fade the longer I stay. Is it the same for you?

I know I must have never married. My parents wanted me to have my own family. I remember that. I wonder now if I was, perhaps, mildly autistic? I never liked the company of people; I could even say this was my defining feature.

I might have even been asexual. Is this too much detail? Not that anybody noticed; I was not the best-looking man you would ever meet. So I never dated.

After my parents died, I was still lowly educated, having never gone to university. But I excelled at my piano lessons. I passed music exams with flying colours. I became a piano teacher, giving private lessons to children and adults. Teaching them was not the same as making friends with them; teaching still afforded me a distance I enjoyed. A distance from everyone.

I cherish my solitude, perhaps a little too much.

I earned enough to buy my own flat, after my parents had passed on.

To die alone—I cannot remember the cause, but neighbours must have smelled my body through my door many days after I collapsed. Without drama.

Soon I found myself here, at the piano in that musky hall—which is not really my old school hall. But, at least, I have been given a workable piano; an instrument for everything I now ache to express. I feel like a kid, playing for strangers—but, really, playing more for myself.

Where did this sadness come from? I have no answer. How does any feeling arise? What was the first thought that gave birth to it, growing and nourishing it? A lost toy? The withdrawn hand

of a parent at a crucial moment in my childhood, when intimacy was required? Only this is certain: I will never release this feeling—except through my performances. A languorous sublimation.

I will go back after this to play another round of Sakamoto. Every time I play is like the first time. I could fill the whole morning and afternoon with my playing, without feeling the time pass. In this way, being in this place is a miracle. This sense of constant focus and never having to sleep. Maybe some of you might join me again, when morning comes and we have stopped listening to each other speak. When you listen to me play, falling down the spaces between the notes, my pauses, you might almost believe—we are kindred.

### 3. THE LOVER

When I wake up—I cannot remember when or what time, who remembers such things—I am in a hotel, the one down the street from here; I think you know the one, grey and looming, with no window unlit. I am alone in my room. It is a really nice room too. I am alone amidst heavy curtains and velvet cushions.

So I leave the room and step out into the corridor. I knock on every door along the corridor, and behind one I hear a muffled noise. I open the door, and on the floor, tied up and gagged, is this guy—no, *boy*—from my teenage years. I used to have the hugest crush on him. The one with that cowlicky hair, coffee-brown skin, bright eyelashes, shoulders as wide as a yoke fastened across oxen. And he is all bound up.

Something just takes me over. I undress. I am undressing him and he is barely struggling. Or I am just yanking down his pants—he is actually wearing the baptismally-white uniform from our secondary school—and I am straddling him on the floor, awkwardly but not awkwardly at all, as he is as hard as rock. I do not know why he is struggling, since he clearly wants this, the way he is throwing his head back when he slips into me, his eyes closing. I ride him hard.

Before we climax together, I pull the gag out of his mouth and he is just not saying *no*—not saying anything at all, as if he has always wanted this to happen.

This feels wrong. I'm supposed to be attacking him, using him, *riding* him. He should not want this. But he does. And I love

it—I hate it too. The way he looks at me, with such acceptance and hunger.

None of this is real. In the midst of bobbing frantically up and down, I keep asking myself, *What is this place? Am I dead—but also, I hope I never leave—*

After I am done, instead of putting back the gag—he has this forlorn look in his eyes now, this undiminished longing which, I know, is an illusion—I unravel the cloth, draw it around his neck and pull at both ends. I pull hard. His tongue sticks out. His eyes bulge.

He is still smiling, not struggling at all. His expression scares me so much that I stop—only then do I squeeze all of the cloth back into his mouth. To stop that smile from widening, his tongue popping out—

I leave him with his pants around his knees on the floor, his hands still tied behind his back. He does not want me to go. I see that from his expression, hazel eyes widening like the mouths of babies. I exit the room. I leave *him*. I can feel his wetness inside me and that is enough. I back out of the room. I even blow him a kiss.

I close the door and forget where my own room was. All the doors are the same, but it no longer matters. I am never going home—whatever *home* means—again. I am stuck here. This feeling, this knowing that I am stuck here—that I will always be *here*—takes over. I see my face in a mirror in the corridor and I understand, as if for the first time; as if I forgot who I was. Who I *am*.

Has something similar happened to all of you? Like when you first get here, you forget what you were before, so that when things happen to *make* you remember, it is a shock every time?

I saw my face in the gilded mirror. I remembered I had become old—my face broken in by so many contours, as if haphazardly drawn by a child. My skin was as loose as a disused dishcloth.

A memory drifted back to me. When I was alive, I was married—the shock of remembering this, decades and decades of being married. Yet I have always wanted *this*—sex with all the boys that I could never have—and it made me feel even older. I was old forever now.

After I broke away from the mirror, I turned towards the corridor of doors, all waiting for me. I opened the next one and there was this boy from the rugby team when I was at university—all tied up too, and gagged—*perfect*.

I could not stop now. Door after door after door. I rode—and will continue to ride—them *all*. In a hotel with an infinite number of rooms, like that thought experiment by German mathematician David Hilbert—I used to teach students about the Infinite Hotel to high school students. Imagine that: all those handsome boys from all my classes!

And they are here now at the hotel, all for me.

When I get bored, or restless, in between sessions—yes, I call them *sessions*—I come here to this garden.

This is how I first noticed you folks, sitting here, on these sloping greens, angling down to that grandiose, open-air stage at the centre of everything. I am sure we can agree that the orchestral band is dull—dull or almost pleasant, depending on your mood, whenever any of us is lying here, staring up at stars that never stop frolicking.

Are those musicians playing Coldplay? I detest Coldplay! And yet, this orchestral version—what song is that anyway, I cannot

remember—is really not so bad. Wait, you hear something else, a different song? *Beethoven?* The orchestra plays something special for each of us—this must be Heaven, right? You tell me.

#### 4. THE NUN

Not just the music, but the languages that we use too. I am speaking French. Can you tell? How wondrous that this place translates us to each other!

So, yes, hello. I cannot remember what my name was. I remember a few essential things—just not my name. I did not expect to see so many of you in this garden. For some reason, I thought I would find myself alone—to wander the garden alone, away from everybody. I am glad to be here. It is nice to be listened to. Who knows why we are here? This is neither a rhetorical nor an existential question. I mean—why *here* in this garden?

Those stars—why do they chase each other like that across the blackness? Is that a band at the centre of this place—this garden that looks like a sinkhole decorated with manicured shrubs and absurd-looking trees?

An orchestra—you must be right—it is an orchestra, not a band, and it is playing a hymn I recognise. Is it just me, or are some of the violins dissonant and jarring?

When I woke up, if you can call it waking, I realised I was dressed like this—like a nun. So I must have been a nun. It is the only explanation. I was probably Benedictine. It would explain this black, girdled habit; this irritatingly loose, white tunic; this veil that does nothing for my face, I am sure; this suffocating wimple.

Trust me—I hate being dressed like this. Neither do I want to peel this off my body. Is that odd?

I woke up in a small church, not too far from here: the spartan chapel with the high clerestory windows. I found myself squatting on the steps between the chancel and the narrow nave, behind a too-low altar; it is not a very grand building, although a part of me recognises it from somewhere, as if I had known it in a previous life.

Asymmetrical light creeps in from deep, vertical cracks in the walls. The natural lighting is always soft inside. I thought it was just the chapel, but I realised, even outside, the daylight is always dim and hazy. At night, when the chapel gets too dark and I cannot find any candles to light, I come out to wander along the alleyways and the piazza. The town looks like a village from another century, or from a rural part of France I used to know and maybe grew up in. One night I walked in a different, less familiar direction, and found this sinking garden.

This is the first time I have seen a group of you sitting around on the garden grounds. Did you just find each other too? None of you can sleep, either? Are we being punished, by being deprived of sleep? Could this be a form of torture, designed to make us talk?

How do I spend my days?

You might laugh. In the chapel, there is nothing to do. I pray, I guess—at least I still know how. I thought of cleaning the chapel to pass the time, but there is nothing to clean—not a cobweb in sight, no dust. Who thought the afterlife—I have guessed *this* much by now, at least, that I am no longer alive—could be so spotless?

I spend my days singing—badly, I'm sure. I am in love with the echoes of the chapel, my solitary voice handed back to me in pieces.

I understood that I am dead—that we are all dead, or ghosts. I tried injuring myself. I tried banging my head against the edge

of the marble altar—when you are bored for long enough, you would do anything—and felt, well, nothing! I tried gouging out my eyes, but they were glass ping-pong balls, impenetrable; or my fingernails were too soft, like petals.

So I sing.

Or I push wooden pews into new and uninspired arrangements down the length of the hall. Sometimes I tilt them all to lean against each other, so they might look as if an invisible hand has pushed them over like a row of dominoes.

This uniform—sorry that my hands cannot stop tugging at this tunic—I just want to yank it off me, and yet I love sliding my hands over it. The way it fits and defines my body. What would I be without my habit? Sorry that you have to watch me doing this; I am not shy, at least not any longer. I guess I should stop. Sometimes I touch myself right there on the smooth, spotless floor, in the middle of the chapel. I imagine God is peering down through the arched ceiling, full of judgement.

What kind of punishment am I supposed to be enduring? Where is the physical pain: the fires, thorns, or knives slicing the soles of my feet, the slow ripping away of reluctant flesh?

Why am I not unhappy?

Perhaps the afterlife is what we make of it. God has put me—put *us*—here to make the most of this place, which I will call *Paradise*.

Except that band, that *orchestra*—

What are they playing now? A song I almost recognise. If I listen to it for long enough, I might even remember the words. But I would not subject you to the shattered sounds of my singing. I really would not want that at all.



### **About the Author**

Cyril Wong is a two-time Singapore Literature Prize-winning poet and the recipient of the Singapore National Arts Council's Young Artist Award for Literature. His books include poetry collections *Tilting Our Plates to Catch the Light* (2007) and *The Lover's Inventory* (2015), novel *The Last Lesson of Mrs de Souza* (2013) and short story collection *Ten Things My Father Never Taught Me* (2014). He completed his doctoral degree in English Literature at the National University of Singapore in 2012. His works have been featured in the Norton anthology *Language for a New Century*, in *Chinese Erotic Poems* by Everyman's Library, and in magazines and journals around the world. His writings have been translated into Turkish, German, Italian, French, Portuguese and Japanese.

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**"Irresistible and haunting.  
Evocative and unforgettable."**

—Shubigi Rao, author of *Pulp*

**"Wong pulls the rug from under us  
but leaves us still standing."**

—KK Seet, author of *Death Rites*

A comedian, a nun, a reality TV star  
and countless others meet in a garden.  
This is not the start of a joke, but the  
beginnings of a parable. These denizens  
might be running out of time, while there  
is all the time in their Kafkaesque world,  
and an orchestra is playing a song  
nobody else may hear.

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