

Singapore Siu Dai:
The SG Conversation in a Cup
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Singapore Siu Dai

The SG Conversation in a Cup

By Felix Cheong
Illustrations by PMan



By The Same Author

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I Watch the Stars Go Out (1999)

Broken by the Rain (2003)

Sudden in Youth: New and Selected Poems (2009)

Young adult fiction

The Call from Crying House (2006)

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The Great Calibrator: A Science Fiction Fable was first published in breakfastnetwork.sg

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Foreword

Felix Cheong gets it. He always has. Hold up a mirror to a face-saving society for too long and the initial dazzle gives way to irritation.

In the unremitting glare, the critical mirror burns the face. Humour is the emollient that softens the impact. In other words, make them laugh or they will come after you with a *parang*.^o

Felix tiptoes across that ever shrinking tightrope with characteristic panache. A man after my own mischievous heart, he goes after them all: inane censorship, parental *kiasuism*,^o economic Darwinism, the shameful exploitation of foreign workers and, of course, the answer to all our societal problems – a packet of tissue paper.

But he satirises. He never sneers; the crucial distinction between the respected humorist and the tiresome rabble-rouser. He moves effortlessly from one contentious topic to another, relying on witty subtlety rather than the weary sledgehammer.

From the indefatigable Mrs. KS Tan to the wonderful anarchist-turned-graffiti artist Mr. KS Tan, his characters are flawed, of course, but funny and, more importantly, identifiable (and the tiger incident at the police post is reason enough to read this book).

I usually turn into a plastic nodding dog when I read Felix because he truly gets it. But then, he always has.

Neil Humphreys

The Life of Slices

Neil Humphreys is a well-known journalist and the bestselling humorist behind four travel books on Singapore. He has also published two novels and several children's storybooks.

Taxi Woes I

“How dare these people!” Mrs. KS Tan muttered to herself.

With five grocery bags, tipping over with the week’s groceries, and a Saturday sun microwaving her from the inside out, she was not prepared to be magnanimous. She had just crossed the bridge to beat the taxi queue snaking 20 people long at Parkway Parade.

Fifteen minutes later, a young couple, freshly arrived and freshly in love, strolled ahead of her, waiting by the curb. They seemed to emote some kind of force field against her dagger stares.

“I was here first!” Mrs. KS Tan said crossly, transferring her bags from her left hand to her right. Still no sign of a taxi.

Quickly, Mrs. KS Tan trotted 15 metres and set herself up ahead of the couple. They didn’t seem to mind, at least that was what she thought. In fact, they were walking away.

Wait a minute. They were now 15 metres ahead, laughing gaily. Oblivious and unashamed – the worst possible combination in young people.

“Okay,” Mrs. KS Tan thought. “Two can play at this game!”

Ten one-upmanship moves later, Mrs. KS Tan was home.

Taxi Woes II

Half an hour inching one ruler-length at a time up the queue, Mrs. KS Tan finally eased herself into a taxi. Though laden with shopping bags, she had chosen to forgo two other taxis because the flag-down fare was three dollars and sixty cents.

“Uncle, Parc Seabreeze. Near Katong,” she said as she quickly closed the door to escape the heat.

The driver didn’t react. He looked like he had already written his will and made his peace with God and the PAP.^o

“Which way you want to go? Shorter way or longer way?” he asked, catching her eyes in the rearview mirror.

“Huh?”

“Shorter way takes more time, longer way takes less.”

Mrs. KS Tan thought it must be the heat but his logic made sense. “Longer way,” she said.

When she woke up from forty winks, the taxi had reached its destination. But not hers.

“Uncle, where is this?” Mrs. KS Tan asked, looking out the window in a daze. It looked like...

“You said, ‘Park, see breeze.’ East Coast Park *lor.*^o A lot of breeze to see.”

At the Matchmaker I

Once again, Viola Lee looked hard at Esther Soo, the young woman sitting opposite her, and tried very hard not to roll her eyes. There were days like this that made her career as matchmaker such a conversation starter at class reunions. In her mind, she filed away every detail, every word. It would be a scream.

“So, your ideal man is...?”

“He must be tall. Not Yao Ming-tall. I don’t want to sniff his armpit each time I look up at him. But at least six feet. And strong, not Arnie-muscular. I don’t want to hurt my back each time we make love.”

Viola nodded, taking down notes. A giggle had already begun at the back of her throat, which she choked off as a cough.

“He must be successful and powerful. I don’t mind if he’s much older. As long as he can show me he can move the world.”

“There’re not many men like that. Except maybe,” she said, clearing her throat, “the Prime Minister.”

“Is he on your list?”

“He’s married, Ms. Soo.”

“I can wait.”

At the Matchmaker II

Somewhere inside Mickey Mao, Viola Lee thought, was probably Mickey Mouse squeezing its way out of a deep, dark, dank place. She looked at the burly man opposite her, built like a locally-assembled tank. He was shy to the point of being nondescript, quiet as a monk fasting. She couldn’t imagine this secondary school teacher trying to keep in check a classroom-full of misfiring hormones.

“You have no preference for your date?” she asked again. He didn’t even meet her eyes halfway.

“No,” a small voice finally said.

“Maybe you can describe what your ideal date looks like? Like her height, build?” she asked, keeping her tone tiptoe-light.

“Ideal date,” he mumbled.

“Yes. Who do you want to go out with?”

He paused again, staring into space. Something explosive looked ready to exit the tank.

A burp later, he finally said, in a torrent that caught her by surprise, “About mid-thirties. Tall and slim. Long, silky hair. Sharp chin and nose. Big, brown eyes.”

Viola tried to prevent her neck from doing a double take. For someone with no preference, this was suddenly very specific. It sounded vaguely familiar. A hazy image took shape

somewhere at the back of her mind but she couldn't be sure.
Some K-pop star maybe?

"You have someone very specific in mind, Mr. Mao?"

"You."

OMG MOMENTS

by Pman



"You, help make more babies! And you, go deliver more babies!
Then we talk about your baby bonus!"

At the Matchmaker III

Here was a perfect specimen. Or speci-man, Viola Lee cheekily punned. Square-jawed, broad-shouldered, pretty handsome but not pretty, prim and prime.

Timothy Toh looked like a laboratory's distillation of good genes. He would be an easy sell. There would be an overnight queue outside her office fighting to date this banker. She might even have to hire a bouncer.

"What are your best abs, I mean, ass...err, attributes?" Viola stuttered, her heart a-flutter, her eyelashes a-flicker. "Stop it, Viola," she told herself. "This is terribly unprofessional!"

She leaned forward, her V-line flowering like a Venus flytrap.

"As you pointed out, my abs and ass are probably my best attributes!" Timothy said, chuckling. If George Clooney was reborn Chinese, it would be this guy.

"He's flirting with me!" Viola thought. She gingerly uncrossed her legs.

"But seriously, I'm patient and caring. I'm a die-hard romantic. But not so old and bald as Bruce Willis. Haha. Got it? Die hard, Bruce Willis?"

Viola's heart suddenly missed a beat. Corny bankers were usually bad news. They would ask their dates to go Dutch and then cracked some lame line about milking milkmaids.

“Got it. Anything else?”
“I’m also a good provider.”
“A good provider?”
“That’s what my wife says.”
“You are married?”
“Only at home.”

At the Matchmaker IV

Trouble at Viola Lee’s office that day took the form of Harry Wee. The moment he lumbered in, startling the furniture, she knew this was no ordinary client.

His name was a dead giveaway. He had an overgrowth of hair all over his body that probably supported its own ecosystem. His head, surprisingly, was Bruce Willis-bald. Viola couldn’t help but wonder what lawn mower was small enough to do the job.

When Harry sat down, he looked Viola straight in the eye, and beyond. She shuddered. He was the first client she felt truly intimidated by.

“You arrange dates?” Harry asked, his voice gruff, all pleasantries left outside the door.

“Yes.”

“How many?”

“Depends on the package. Minimum five.”

Harry nodded. Then he smiled a smile that would forever violate Viola’s meaning of the word.

“Comes with ice-cream?”

“Ice-cream?”

“You know, ice-cream.”

“You want Ben and Jerry’s with the dates?”

About the Author



Felix Cheong has published nine books, including four volumes of poetry. His collection of short stories, *Vanishing Point*, was longlisted for the 2013 Frank O'Connor Award. Conferred the Young Artist of the Year for Literature in 2000, he was named by Readers Digest as the 29th Most Trusted Singaporean in 2010. He is currently an adjunct lecturer with Murdoch University,

University of Newcastle, Temasek Polytechnic and LASALLE College of the Arts.