

last few lines of the story. I like to add a little verbal flourish to the story's ending, like a ribbon that functions to tie everything together and present the finished story to the readers. This is the magical moment when the tables are turned and the story speaks to me. I usually have a physical reaction to a completed story. I know that I have the story's ending when I get goosebumps as I type the final words. Pleasantly exhausted, I put away my laptop, with the story finished and proudly wearing its tiny ribbon.

THE SUMMER OF GROWING UP: STORIES OF CHILDHOOD

The creative component of this thesis is a collection of short stories titled *The Summer of Growing Up: Stories of Childhood*. These stories feature the theme of childhood, with some having a more pronounced coming-of-age narrative than others. All stories are written with an adult readership in mind. The seven stories collected here span much of my writing life. Some of the stories are products of recent creative writing classes, while others are older stories. The oldest story in this collection was written while I was still an undergraduate student.

The title of this collection is a phrase lifted from "Sea Magic," the collection's first story, which also happens to be my first published work. "Sea Magic" is a coming-of-age story featuring a young boy and a mysterious girl from the sea. As is typical of my earlier writing, this story straddles the line between fantasy and realism, but with the story's heart firmly set in the real world. This story was published in the *Philippines Free Press* back in 2007. I have since updated the story to match my current voice as a writer.

"Two Stories from the Day I Was Born" is a story about a Filipino-Chinese boy's understanding of the events surrounding the day of his birth. While this story does not have a pronounced coming-of-age plot, I decided to include it in this collection because of its depiction of childhood, particularly the relationship between a boy and his *yaya*. The story also shows a more humane and hopeful way the fraught dynamics of social classes in the Philippines can be negotiated. An earlier version of this story appears in volume twelve of the *Likhaan* journal.

"The Mop Closet" is a personal favorite because of the story's technical complexity. In it, I experiment with an observer narrator, whose brief interaction with the events of the plot alter its direction altogether.

Because of the narrator's distance from the events of the plot, much of the tragedy in the story is left unsaid. At the end of the story, two characters fall from innocence and come of age. The story features childhood friendships, as well as bullying. The story appears in volume fifteen of the *Likhaan* journal.

The most recent story in this collection is "The Little Empress of China." It is a story of friendship between two young girls living in the same household. It examines how childhood friendships develop and how social class plays a role in these friendships. In this story, I attempt to withhold information from the reader—and to a certain extent from the child protagonist herself—until the story draws to a close.

"Lovely" is a memorable story for me because it was the most painful story to write. The inspiration for this story is the case of Jenifer Laude, a transwoman who was raped and murdered by an American soldier back in 2014. This story is probably the darkest one in the collection because it tackles the subject of rape. It also shows how the powers that be employ gaslighting as an insidious yet effective tool against the oppressed. In this story, the fall from innocence is a hard one, but I'd like to think that the hope at the end still shines bright.

"Best Before" is an older story of mine that appears in the online literary journal *Queer Southeast Asia*. The protagonist in the story is a boy in his early twenties, who behaves very much like a child when it comes to matters of the heart. Because falling in love is also the stuff of coming-of-age stories, I felt that "Best Before" deserved a spot in this collection.

The last story is "Lucia's Grandmother: Pages from the Journal of Dr. Harold J. Wright." Formalistically, this story is the most experimental in the collection in that it makes use of journal entries and letters. It is also what some would call a frame story, which is a story framed within another story. I make use of this technique because I feel that the main story—one that is inspired by myth—needs some kind of foregrounding to establish itself not as myth per se but as one person's narration of that myth. In addition to being a coming-of-age story, this, I believe, is an exploration into the very nature of stories themselves and the mysterious power that stories have over our lives.

After reading these stories, the reader will notice the workings of *kapwa* in each one of them. The characters in these stories suffer in more ways than one. This suffering is brought about by some form of systemic

evil the characters discover within their worlds. I would like to think that despite the severity of this evil, the stories still have a sense of hope. The characters in the stories are able to overcome this evil with their ability to empathize with an equally suffering other. In a sense, the children in these stories come of age by learning to live responsibly in the worlds they occupy, sharing with the other not only their suffering but also their joy.

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