

Lì Xì

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

Last week,
on the first day of the Lunar's New Year,
I woke up, excited for those sparkling,
bright red envelopes,
no longer stuffed with wrinkly,
scowling faces of George Washington,
Lincoln or even Hamilton.

But now, grown-ups,
always so privy to the current inflation rate,
reward children with playfully stern faces of Jackson,
Grant, and even for some lucky child,
the almost smiling mug of Benjamin Franklin,
who wasn't even a president.

But, when I walked into the living room,
eyes readied with expectation,
the smallest child ran up to me and held her hand out,
her eyes readied with expectation.

That's when the horrible truth dawned on me:
I'm no longer permitted to prance around,
happily munching on colorful pieces of *mứt*.
Instead now, I am expected by adoring children
to be privy to the current inflation rate.

Because *I'm* the grown-up now.

(Feb. 22/2010)

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The Computer Screen

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

It's midnight and your face is
still empty. Your glassy eyes
drill intimidation into my self-
worth.

The little blinking line on your
white, porcelain skin continues
to flash mockery at me, laughing
at my incompetence.

Your breathing is becoming
haggard, probably from all that
dust. I should clean you. But I don't.

I just sit and stare back at you,
waiting desperately for
inspiration to grace me with its
presence.

But it won't. I know that and
you know that. This is just
a game. Do you break first or do I?

(Feb. 21/2010)

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The Piano Teacher

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

The chill of her touch
always lingered on his
skin long after the contact.
He practiced each day, and
yet tried hard not to.

Mistakes forced her
to touch him, to correct
the tips of his fingers,
to lean in, so close
that her long, dark hair
brushed against his cheek.

To him, she smelled
like music—cinnamon,
lavender, strawberries—
all the clichéd smells of
romance.

All week, his nostrils
yearned for that soft

fragrance, that
melancholic scent
that hung around her
like mist.

And his every pore
lusted for that touch,
that cool, indifferent
touch that haunted his
dreams and filled his
mind with thoughts
of her, barely enough
to sustain him until
the next lesson.

(Feb. 20/2010)

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