

Connectivity

February 17th, 2020

My cousin video calls me during a family dinner. Unsurprisingly my parents, aunts, uncles are absent as they are at work.

We only live to work; not work to live!

“It’s just Grandma and Grandpa here. I’m so bored!”

June 15th, 2020

My parents have stopped working because of the restrictions. I explain to my father what I’ve been writing for my thesis over a video call. Mom is in the background.

“Give Ah Gung a call when you have time.”

June 17th, 2020

Ah Poh picks up and passes the phone to Ah Gung. My fiercely independent Gung Gung now relies on a cane. I ask why hasn’t he seen a doctor yet. Ah Gung scoffs, “They don’t know what’s wrong and it is too dangerous to go to the hospital.”

June 20th, 2020

My cousin video calls me while she’s at a family gathering.

I say hello to everyone.

The camera pans over to Ah Gung. He’s sitting away from everyone while facing the window.

He looks like an angel bathed in light.

June 28th, 2020

My cousin sends a text: *Hey did you hear? Grandpa has cancer and he’s in the hospital.*

I call Mom immediately and she picks up,

“Did you want to see Grandpa?”

“Sure.”

I see him in the hospital bed and I burst into tears. He pulls down his mask.

“No crying! Just do well in school, okay?”

Okay, okay.

“How can I rest if I know you are this sad?”

I spend the rest of the night crying. Thesis writing can wait. This is the last time I speak to him.

June 29th, 2020
I consider flying back home.

Questions arise.
What about the thesis?
How bad is the cancer?
How much time does he have left?

Would I even be able to travel back?

July 2nd, 2020
No one knows what's going on. My mother complains about not understanding the doctors. I wish I was there to help. I phone the hospital.
"Sorry, we're just so swamped right now."

July 5th, 2020
A friend, who learned of Ah Gung, calls and asks,
"How are you?"
"Great. I've been in bed crying all weekend."
"Why?"
I end the call.

July 9th, 2020
Each time I get a text from Mom, my stomach drops.

Chemo.

Bone marrow.

Pain.

Pray.

Pain.

I have to keep writing.

Pain.

Pain.

July 14th, 2020
I get a call from Mom at 10 in the morning.

"Rebecca? Rebecca!"
"Mom?"

My cousin sends a few texts.

What is Uncle saying in the group chat? I can't understand him.

I listen to the voice clips and all I hear are screams.

July 23rd, 2020

Someone comes in to fix the air conditioner.

“It’s too bad with COVID, eh?”

“Yeah, my grandpa died and I can’t go see my family today.”

He smiles politely and uncomfortably.

The Zoom link for the funeral does not work.

Rebecca Zhao