

The background of the entire page is a photograph of green foliage. In the upper right, there are several bright green, oval-shaped leaves. A pink flower with multiple petals is visible in the upper left and center. The lower half of the image shows more green leaves, some of which are slightly out of focus. The text is overlaid on this background.

# ***TRANSIT AT GREEN LINE***

Ivan Chuang

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# PROLOGUE

Every healthy Singaporean male enlists into the army for two years as part of National Service. Whether they come out of it healthy, is another matter,

as long as the paper reflects the result.

This is the result of two years of existential reflection in green.

# TRANSIT AT GREENLINE

I stand amidst a home-bound commute  
on a journey otherwise

My feet carries me west-bound

But my mind still resides east

Still in the embrace of cotton sheets

Still grasping a sunset long gone

The separation leaves the soul confused  
desperate to anchor

Yet, it can only wait for the tides

to bring mind back to body

To bring mind, body and soul to calm waters  
once again

## NINETEEN

I left a home to hands behind green

I dug my own grave in a cemetery storm

I tasted bitter nihilism and spat

I craved for linen and brew

I explored the stream of fire and honey

I worked to read phonetic glyphs

I seeked my utmost for the highest

I yearned for the clouds to fall

I found a path only to lose it to the haze

I took a left turn on a right winding road

I lost much but gained abundantly more



# RESONANCE

Sometimes, I prefer not to use words

Often, I feel that they are inadequate

A choreography of

Pantomime

The eye dances , the hands

I've learnt to look past the walls of Babel

Do you believe in telepathy?

Look me in the eye,

Do you get what I'm saying?

these foreign tongues

I give up.

Some things just can't be expressed through words.

If only we had telepathy

Or a greater empathy.

# **SPLATTER, SCATTER**

We're liquid inside

Creatures flexible and adaptable

But that liquid is thick

and it's name is blood

People don't like blood

Hold it in, they say.

But every now and then,

I choose to spill it all.

Some are caught by surprise.

Some choose ignorance.

The true ones,

They spill their blood with you

They'll share their blood with you

Not all of it, but some of it.

People don't like blood

Hold it in, they say

But every now and then,

We choose to spill it all.

We can spill it onto paper

Or spill it on the stage

Spill it for the world

Leave your crimson mark

To turn bonds of water into blood

# WAYFARING

For the many years I've sailed the seas,  
on the beauty Wayfaring.

I thought I could sail forever,

but this ship I ride has journeyed far.

Past the cities and ports we've visited,

some have chosen to stay,

some have chosen to build their own ships.

Some have died, some have resurrected.

I told a friend once that Wayfaring's  
immortal.

I've grown older since.

And I still hold on to that.

But I've learnt that Wayfaring is not the ark  
I'm on.

Wayfaring is many.

Wayfaring is countless mortal ships and one  
immortal vessel.

And oh, how much more beautiful is she.

# WAVES

The colour runs, leaving a desaturated vision.

Tinted off-blue with a dash of anticipation.

The stream shifts red through cries for blue.

The floor is an infectious cold grey.

Such words are but an exploding cell,

releasing carriers priming thou.

A yearning to be washed by streams of blue,

yet only satisfied amongst the stone floor.



# INTERLUDE: PERTAINING TO, BUT NOT OF, FIELD CRAFT

## On Bees

I have since gotten used to its call. It can get lonely in the field. There is a lot of waiting and often times, alone. But the bee to keep me company. First, it'll announce its presence with a buzz to the ear, tingling the nerves but not arousing anxiety. I have learnt that they mean no harm. I'll watch it come, circle me a few times and land on my covered arm, or my hat, hardly ever on bare skin. (If it should land on bare skin, I'll feel it scratching, like the lick of a cat's tongue.) It's my sweat, or my stink in the field. Whatever it is, it seems to call out to the bees and only the bees. Hardly do flies

come or mosquitoes. I'll watch it scuttle around, tasting the moisture, searching for crevices or where the scent seems the strongest. It's abdomen pulses a hypnotising array of black and yellow, black and yellow. Wherever I go, there seems to be bees. Even beyond the native lands. I'll wonder where the bee comes from, how far it has travelled for my dew. I wonder what's in it for the bees, what nutrients they're trying to get at. I wonder what the bees think I am, what strange flora that seeps this sap.

## On Rain

Rain is depressing. Twice have I been brought to a low by the sound of a thousand droplets, of the heaven cracker. The first time, it was in the midst of shellscape digging. All the effort put to digging my own grave drowned by the pour, turning my resting place to a mud pool.

I remember just sitting at the edge of the rectangular hole I had dug, head down and just drowning in the sound of the pouring rain, letting the cold sweep over me, settling on a journey towards the inner conscious in an attempt to escape the cold reality I was in. The second time, I learnt of the blue contagion. The infection started with a friend on the brink of nihilism in the cold rain. He wanted to fall out but he sought comfort in us. We did not feel it but the nihilist in him started to corrupt our souls too. Before we even realised, the pouring rain serving as a catalyst, we were all at a new low. There were hugs of attempted comfort, shaky words of encouragement but the contagion had infected us all. We sat in silence, embracing the rain on our face and watching the emptiness of darkness ahead, washed helpless in the flow of time with an amnesia of the coming morn.

## On Darkness

In the field time loses meaning. Hours, days, weeks, they lose meaning. There is only light and darkness. I rise and fall in the dark, minutes from the slow fade to light. It's somewhat peaceful, watching monochrome fade to shades of blue and finally to colour. It's quiet save for the crickets and frogs. The air is cool to the touch. In the dark, I lie on the dirt, face up to the heavens. From the cracks in the canopy I see the brilliant twinkling of stars and distant planets. In the field, there is no light pollution and the night sky is not shrouded. I see Orion and Polaris. I see the cratered moon. The world seems to be at a standstill for me to observe.

## On Air

One can see it as an escapade from concrete though somewhat unwillingly. Amidst the flora and fauna, the natural greens and brown, the air is noticeably cleaner. I find myself breathing easier and the air is subtly nicer to the nose and lungs. The fragrance of broken leaves and wet soil is in a weird way, given the circumstances of the situation, calming. There are fragrances the pique curiosity, aromatics rare in the urban streets. Such feelings are reminiscent of a walk in the park or a nature reserve though somehow intensified. (There is irony here in that such artificial scenes serve to reminisce us of nature.) However, should you ask me to explain why, I would be unable to. Such air is good for the mind and good for the soul, a relief from the claustrophobic concrete towers.

On Vegetation

Excess is never a positive. Back in urbanisation, I must admit a fascination to plants. Mainly on succulents and cacti, these plants seem to be sources of calmness and equilibrium. It might be the parallel of life and stillness, it might be the psychological effects of green. Whatever it is, even a mere photograph can soothe this soul. However, in the field, plants evoke no such emotion. (Rather it is the air as mentioned.) Plants are merely part of the situation, obstacles and covers. In significance, trees take over concrete buildings. Leaf litter takes the road. The occasional fern or fungi is like a graffitied mailbox, interesting but merely a part of the environment. Plants lose their magic once out of the harsh concrete city.

# THE PLATEAU

I could run a thousand factors,

find a million reasons,

but does it matter?

I analyse the paths ahead,

seek the brightest of the dim paths,

but does it matter?

System is everything,

the current takes me as it wills,

I'm merely a speck in the winds.

Yet, at this moment it seems

an opportunity for self to will,

to pull the switch on the rails,

but maybe it's just an illusion still.

I'll just live in the moment,

I'll just keep pushing the wall.



# THE HEART

It flutters.

It's not something new, but a phenomenon of gradual awareness. But it seems, ignorance was bliss. For now that I know,

The heart flutters stronger.

It starts with a tingling of the appendages. Then a physical pounding. Then a rush of blood. Flush. One reaches a hypersensitive state but yet, processes little, overwhelmed by the input.

A toxic concoction of adrenaline and paranoia.

The mind is stronger than the body. But what can one do when the mind is drunk of this poison. Still lucid but that itself remains a thought trapped in a body of excited stupor. The executive has pulled the trigger.

One can only wait for the drugs to run their course. To seek asylum in quietness and peace. For even the slightest reflection of the fluttering heart makes it gallop faster.

# WHAT ARE AFTERNOONS FOR?

The mind is pine fresh and full of zest

when light first sprouts from the soil

Sand falls and we become more rooted

Squashed by the atmosphere

Then night falls and the sky darkens

The end approaches and we become owls

Only the man of the sun needs sleep

And this night is passionately young

What are afternoons for?

Can't we just have the zests of mornings and  
the passion of nights?

# FEAT

It's 11.15am.

The sky is grey, as if it's mourning for the expected.

We were supposed to start at 6.30am.

But the heavens grumbled. We're not in the position to oppose, held by a script written in blood.

11.15am.

I stare at the tower before me.

It's taller than I remember.

The same ominous grey of the heavens.

Inside, I've shriveled. I've breathed my last.

I've lost count of how many times I've stood  
at its feet, striking my fist against its wall,  
teeths gritted.

Go. No countdown, no warning, not ready.

I run, mind blank.

Just get it over with.

And over I go.

It takes a moment to process the sight before

me, to wipe the fog of a memory from  
younger days.

The desaturation fades away.

I've scaled the wall.

I guess we do shine at our darkest moments.

But I've left two comrades behind.

## **BROWNEYES**

Her eyes were pools of brown flecked with gold, that swirled with every movement of her eyes.

She laughed, the recollection of a finch warbling in spring. The muscles loosened around her creased eyes and her gaze fixed on mine, the echo of her song still ringing in my ears.

She whispered softly, words delicate, meant for my ears alone, our pupils locked onto each other, a myriad of gold dancing between us in tune with her composition.



## TWENTY

The day was spent decluttering, with foresight and shaky feet.

Something I haven't done in a while, but maybe much needed without realisation.

To plot the lines within the fields, to tend to the garden and arrange the bouquet.

I watch as the sun sets into a weird mix of orange and purple, as I dread and beckon the future.

The heart murmurs and shivers, the floodgates opens, the ink flows.

It's been a while,

I miss the etching and scratching, this craving  
grows stronger.

My hands can't wait to fire the bullet,

To wield the rod, to carve the stone.

But there's 159 to go.

# STAINED WOLVES

The truth is,

I'm exhausted.

I want to release this changeling,

explore this cavern.

But I'm afraid of the eyes that keep me in  
stasis, the wolves that cry, the stained church  
glass.

Still, I'll take the first step,

and fall into the abyss, maybe?

# TRAVELING

In the clutter, I shy.

I yearn but keep my hands tied.

The still small voice whispers,

The wings beat.

Time dirt got in my nails,

Time water got in my ears.

Time to keep my head up against the current.

# GUT

End of one misery, start of another

I see the light ahead but the past grips with  
strong tendrils

two days feels like weeks, feels like years

feels like two blinks of the eye

At least,

time can start ticking again,

towards the great escape.

Gut.

# ANNEX

# **SLEEPING AMIDST MANDARINS**



## PROLOGUE

Sleeping Amidst Mandarin is a partly written, a partly recollection, of my time to Taiwan in the military. These twenty-one days were the most memorable days of my military experience and even though I established that only after a year of service, now, at the end of the two years, it still holds through. Thus, I have chosen to pen these days down onto paper and reinforce the details of these days. Unfortunately, I had only chosen to do this a month after returning and by then, the memory had already become hazy and imperfection was eating away at the edges. Thus, Sleeping Amidst Mandarin was never completed and never perfect. These are the remnants.

Day 1, Changi Airport, 2345. I arrive with my parents at the airport and we head towards the reporting point. Only to find an empty space. I glance at my watch. 2355. For a moment, anxiety rushes in but I'm sure that this is where we had been asked to report. Tell tale signs are other guys in polo shirts and buzz cuts. We had to be standardised. The image we were to present was not of class or well-manners. It was order, conformity, automata. I spot the three who had come to bid farewell and leave my parents, promising to meet them again before the final goodbye. The four of us chatted about something I can't remember. Maybe the muse concert was mentioned but I'm not sure. There was not much to say except goodbye and good luck. We huddle and prayed before I joined my parents again. Such times like these are to be cherished, a taste of sweet koinonia.

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A line finally emerged from the incoherence. 0010. Turns out punctuality wasn't much of an issue. The flight, I eventually found out, was only at 0200. I joined the line and received my boarding pass. The thought of heading to Taiwan again was triggering reminiscence of the last time I went to Taiwan in 2013 on a school organised vacation. This inadvertently released odd feelings of enthusiasm and prospect. We were finally called to go and I waved my last goodbye to my parents. It would be three weeks before I'd meet them again.

We finally boarded the plane. It was 0220. Twenty minutes late. While waiting in arrival, I had a jelly doughnut and an iced chocolate drink. They were overpriced but that's to be expected here. We boarded a Hello Kitty decorated plane, an ironic contrast to the

supposed toughness that was to be expected of us.

I had gotten a window seat, much to my delight. I like window seats. It's a fascinating sight to see the plane lift off the ground, to see buildings turn to kaleidoscopic dots, a rare glimpse of the circuitry of modern society, more so in the dark where lights blinked and formed patterns out from the darkness.

Breakfast was served early and it was pretty decent. In my opinion, breakfast is the best of airplane meals. At this point, I had lost track of time on the flight. I tried to watch a movie that I had downloaded on my phone. It was a Spanish film, *Medianeras*. However, the vibrations and noises of the plane made the film unwatchable in my small mobile screen. Instead, I drifted off to the song '500 miles', which I had then decided, the 'theme song' for this trip.

I was woken up by harsh sunlight. The sun had risen and outside was an ocean of white. We were above the clouds and they spanned the horizon with occasional towers. It was a magnificent sight. After half an hour, the plane started to descend, dipping into the white oceanic mass. We were finally touching down. The blue sky was replaced by a fog of grey which was then replaced by our first clear birds eye view of Taiwan, of its mountains and valleys, of its cities and farms. A myriad of structures, both natural and man-made, so unlike the flatness of Singapore.

Going through customs brought waves of nostalgia. Not much had changed. I remember the dull monotony of the airport architecture. I remember the clock that also displays outside temperature. I remember the Mr. Brown cafe where I bought my first Taiwanese food, a delicious bread decorated with sauces and

fillings I can't remember. However, this time, a second breakfast was served in boxes, an assortment of miniature baked goods and a carton of sweet milk tea. It was pretty tasteful. We were packed into buses and headed off to Mei Lin Camp. We were told that the bus ride was three hours. I watched the city high rises slowly disappear toÂ mountains, rural apartments and paddy fields. We weren't going to be seeing urban civilisation for a long time.

Mei Lin camp's buildings were of the typical grey stone and red bricks, an monotonous industrial aesthetic common in Taiwan. The moment we stepped out of the buses, the warmth of an ending summer was apparent. Though the sun was hidden in a blanket of grey, it's heat embraced us strongly. I wouldn't be needing my hoodie as much as back in 2013. It was already 1100.

We were presented to our bunks. One platoon to one bunk, bunk bed squashed beside bunk bed. There was barely room to sit on the floor, let alone room to keep our bags. We eventually had to stack bags on top of others. We collected our uniform and basic necessities for our stay before heading to lunch. The cookhouse was air conditioned, a nice surprise. The food was excellent, and even that feels like an understatement. The food was so much better than food back in camp. Portions were bigger. The rice was exceptionally delicious. It was starchier, more similar to sushi rice. Fruits were exotic, there were watermelons and pineapples. (Watermelons back in Singapore were only available to high ranking personnels.) Then, there was the ice cream. Rather than the frozen syrup or cheap chocolate ice cream we got back in Singapore, we were given proper ice cream, vanilla cones with a jam stuffed

centres, coated in white chocolate and crispy flakes. Heavenly. We soon found out that the showers were heated as well, for the winter I guess. That night, we were given instant noodles. The noodles had real meat in them, nothing like the variety you could find in Singapore. Our residence in Taiwan thus far was exceeding all expectations.

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The next day, day 2, was an admin day as well, to prepare us for moving out on Wednesday. The holiday mood was reaching its end. Though excitement still lingered, it was mixed with anxiety of the unknown.

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Day 3, today's activity was Terrain Reading March. It was the first time we were going out into the training grounds of MeiLin, the first



time leaving camp. We boarded a tonner and moved out early. We were expected to be back in time for lunch. The ride was surprisingly smooth. I was told later of the suspension the tonners were equipped with. We journeyed into the plantations, where the training grounds are. We waved at some of the local aunties riding their farming vehicles, moving at speeds much faster than the vehicle we were in.

We dropped of in front of a small temple and a closed barbershop. Then, we were led off to explore the terrain of rural Taiwan. We walked along plantations of bamboo and mandarins that were still green, only to ripen in November. We finally departed off the farmer track and headed up knolls, climbed through bamboo plantations and walked along a ridge line, the edge barely an inch from our feet. There were points where we had to

swing from bamboo to bamboo, holding a tight grip on the poles or risk falling down a steep valley. Some knolls had to be climbed on fours, some knolls were of wet stone and had to be threaded down carefully lest we slipped. Some journeys down the knoll were slid down. I mastered the art of sliding with one leg squatted and one leg stretched out, preventing any muddying of the buttocks. All these familiarisation would prove useful to the eight days of outfield to come. We walked up to the base of an electrical tower where we took a group photo. I never got hold of the photo. It was only a few hours but the journey felt much much longer. We headed back for lunch and prepared for the next two days of outfield.

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Day 4, we moved out early. We were going to be out for two days. Our training grounds

were on a side of a knoll. The other side was a plantation of mandarins. We had a magnificent view of Taiwan's plantations and mountains. Thus we harboured there, pitching our tents first thing. The weather was hot and dry. It reached a temperature of 37 degrees Celsius and thus, my section was asked to rest in a cluster of bamboos. The tents provided little shade. We did what was needed of us these two days and they passed by quickly. We packed up and headed back to camp to prepare for exercise long stride, what I was most looking forward to.

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Day 5, we were released at the temple again. We were all together except for one member who was put into another group. One section, to survive three days by ourselves. This was Exercise Longstride. 30km, was the estimated walk from start to end. Our field packs were

stocked with rations we knew we weren't going to eat. There was better food to be found in the wild, or rather, better food to find us. We walked in search of our first checkpoint. We walked past plantations into a small town. My buddy pointed out that the electric poles had gospel messages spray painted on them. The town was very empty, save for a few dogs on leashes. At this point, my friend decided to pull out his phone and we listened to music while we walked, music we hadn't listened to in a long time. We walked out of it to plantation yet again, where we would be approaching our first checkpoint. It was behind a water tank. We eventually made it and found a checkpoint. But it wasn't ours. We scouted the area for a good hour. Luckily, a rover drove up to us and we found out that there was an error. They had labelled our checkpoint wrongly. We moved on to find our second checkpoint,

a good hour wasted but our morale still strong.

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Author's Note: At this point, my memory blurs chronologically. I can only remember the exercise in segments, like excerpts from a film.

Our next checkpoint was at a palm plantation up a knoll. When we reached there, the first thing I noted was the scarecrows. They were mannequin heads on sticks. We weren't going to be spending the night there. However, we ended up spending all the way till evening there before we found our checkpoint. The view was fantastic though. We were looking down onto a valley of mandarin plantations.

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The first time we met her was after the rain. We were walking on a road up a knoll when it began to pour heavily. We quickly found shelter in an open garage. There didn't seem to be anyone there so we took the initiative. Eventually, the owners drove up in their truck and we asked to harbour temporarily. They graciously let us. The rain soon stopped and we moved ahead. We encountered another section and greeted them like long lost brothers. They told us that she was near and that excited us. At that moment, a scooter approached us and that was the first time we saw her. She was in her thirties, wearing a poncho to shelter from the rain. Her goods were in two ice boxes, one in front of the seat, the other on the back. One housed delicious milk tea and the other, warm piles of JiPa, stuffed pancakes and burgers. She was mostly sold out, having only xiao ji pa left. I bought one and in the cold wet weather, warm fried

chicken with its rich oil and mildly spicy seasoning was the best thing ever. Our morale was boosted. Our steps were faster.

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A dog began to follow us. It was brown and black, male. It was friendly but truly, it just wanted food. It was evident when my friend took out a bag of chips and the mere crinkling of the packet caused him to prick his ears and approach my friend, who was unfortunately, muslim. We took photos with him. It was rather photogenic. When it realised that food was not going to be given, it left us in search of a kinder group.

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We encountered a rover who gave us apples and cigarettes. He was extremely nice. It was good to see some sense of goodness any time

in the army.

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I remember our first harbouring site. It was in the middle of a mandarin plantation. It was already drizzling. I prayed that it would remain so. However, it was not meant to be. Soon we were scrambling to set up our basha. We slept three to a tent and that night, I found myself sharing a roll of Oreos with my buddies in the heavy rain.

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It was already nightfall. We were at a split in the path. At this point, there was conflict within the section. Two alpha navigators with opposing views. We weren't making progress, more of arguing and bickering. Nobody was willing to set aside their grudges and emotions. My buddy came up to me and



asked for a picture of the situation. He recognised that I was clear headed. At this point, I took on alpha navigator. I scolded them for their inability to stay mission focused. We moved off into the night. Yet, I knew that taking on alpha navigator, I would soon have the finger pointed at. It's always easier to blame the guy in charge.

---

We were walking along the ridge line when we spotted a flight of steps. They were crudely stuck into the ground but were steps nonetheless. We walked down them into a playground. Another flight of steps at the other end led to the town. We decided to rest there and snack on raw Maggi. It was out of bounds but we didn't care.

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The map told us to follow the electrical towers and so we did. We were walking along a road when an elderly woman started signalling to us. She started telling us something in hokkien. Thankfully, a friend was fluent in hokkien and he helped us translate. Turns out, the road ahead was closed and we should've turned left on the junction we had passed. Had she not been around to tell us that, we would have wasted half an hour walking ahead only to turn back. Of course, we managed to get some more tips out of her. She was more than glad to help us 'ah bing ge'.

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At some point, we had walked past plantation into what I guessed was a middle income region. It was already nightfall and street lamps lit the way. Open plantations soon became fenced, rural houses looked more

proper and well-furnished. We were walking on the road when a car decided to zoom past us, at incredible speed. Had we been in its way, there would have been no time to jam the brakes. Somebody was joyriding. At this point, I was reminiscing walking home late night where public transports were no longer available.

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Still journeying in the middle income region, we suddenly realised that the giant Buddha was staring down at us. The giant buddha, was an enormous statue painted gold of a laughing Buddha. It was visible from Mei Lin Camp and one of the first things I noticed upon stepping off the bus. From Mei Lin Camp, one sees the Buddha facing away from us, only showing a partial face. We were told that some nights, the Buddha would turn and face us while we slept.

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We were finally reaching the end point. The final checkpoint was a temple at the top of a hill. We met the ninja lady once more, snacking on our final milk tea and fried chicken, providing us the last boost to the end. When we saw the temple in sight, the atmosphere was heavy. After two full days, we were finally here. My buddy ran into the temple, arms high and shouting with joy. It felt good that it was finally over.

**AND LIFE STARTS AGAIN**