

Ya-Ling Peng

Wings

Ya-Ling,
*This leaf looks like a pair of wings.
I am the wing on the left; you are the wing on the right.
Only if we are together, can we then fly.*
Yeh Yeh

Yeh Yeh wrote me this letter in the winter of 1996. At the beginning of 1997 we got married in New York. In the overseas telephone call from Taiwan my father said: "I really wish to see you in a white wedding dress". Yeh Yeh went to a park covered in snow and picked some green vines. We took our wedding pictures in a friend's studio wearing only the vines on our heads. "I wish I had a good father and your father is what I consider an ideal father". This confession of Yeh Yeh's won my father's heart.

After the honeymoon in New York, Yeh Yeh continued his study at New York University and I came back to Taiwan alone to produce a new play. On the morning of my departure, I didn't want to get out of bed and leave him. Yeh Yeh came out of the bathroom and pinned my body down on the bed: "I beg of you, please, just this once, let me have a good memory of you." He said: "Please learn to squeeze the toothpaste nicely! Just this once, let me remember how good you are so I don't get angry with you first thing in the morning!"

This was the first time I was asked to change in our relationship. Should I change? If not, could our wings still let us fly?

Two years later, Yeh Yeh came back to Taiwan from New York to become my right hand. With him by my side, it's like having another pair of eyes, seeing things from a different angle, an angle I would not be able to see on my own. It's also like having another pair of legs, because he is so energetic and loves to explore. Together, we get a lot of work, which I wouldn't manage without him. Yeh Yeh is like having ten more pairs of hands because he does everything that I cannot or will not do. Life became more complete and we flew higher than before. It's nice to have each other.

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Still, we fight. We fight about just about everything, what to wear, what to eat, how to deal with people, how to handle things... We do agree on lots of things, but we disagree on even more. Often I have to tell my theatre group colleagues, "Yeh Yeh and I are a couple, but this does not mean that my opinions are also his opinions. Likewise, his opinions cannot represent mine. I am I and he is he."

We can't help arguing. Sometimes I wonder. Why do I want to burden myself with all these troubles? I was fine on my own. I am able to do what I set out to do. Why do I want someone by my side, always giving me a hard time? I look back on this relationship: twelve years. If it wasn't for all these conflicts in our intimate relationship, I would not be a good listener, I would not hear the winter cries coming from the black hole of my soul. Without these fights, I would not know the resilience of my inner energy. I am able to release my anger, frustration and the feelings of incompetence and foolishness in these fights. Without them, I could have been hurt more in the outside world. Without these fights, how could I have understood and tolerated all the hard work of my theatre life?

No wonder Buddhists think married couples are here in this world to learn together - to study the secrets of life, to face our innermost vulnerability and darkness with naked sincerity.

Whenever I watch Yeh Yeh in public, be it in the bank, in the restaurant or the supermarket, I think to myself, "what a handsome man". If I have to choose one person to share my life with, even after all these years and all these fights, it will always

be him.

This morning, I got up and squeezed my toothpaste. Some toothpaste left a white stain on the washbasin. I brushed my teeth happily. Yeh Yeh was brushing his teeth in another bathroom, his own bathroom. We use different brands of shampoo, different cleaning lotions, different hairbrushes... We have our own sets of everything. Yet, we share this pair of wings and try to fly together in this chaotic life of ours.

Translated from Chinese by Balas King

YA-LING PENG (Taiwan) works as an actress, director and playwright. She started her theatre career in 1981 as the founding member of Square-Round Theatre. In 1988-1991, Ya-Ling Peng studied acting in London with Animate Theatre and London School of Mime and Movement and joined the theatre company Tragic Carpet. In 1993, she founded the first elder's theatre group, Modern Form Theatre Group, in the south part of Taiwan. In 1995 she founded Uhan Shii Theatre Group in Taipei. She has organ-ised Magdalena Festivals and meetings in Taipei.