

## Vanilla in the Stars<sup>1</sup>

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When I was a child,  
I used to gaze at the stars above

our garden of roses, jasmine and *lingzhi* by the sea,  
wondering how far away they really were,  
whether they were shining still at the source  
by the time their light reached me...

I was told that everyone was born with a star  
which glowed or dimmed with the fortunes of each.  
I also heard people destined to be close  
were at first fragments of the same star

and from birth went searching for each other.  
Such parting, seeking, reuniting might take  
three lifetimes with centuries in between.  
I had thought all these were but myths...

Now decades later, I read about the life of stars,  
how their cores burn for ten billion years,  
how towards the end, just before oblivion,  
they atomize into nebulae of fragile brilliance –

ultra violet, infra red, luminous white, neon green or blue,  
astronomical butterflies of gaseous light  
afloat in a last waltz choreographed by relativity,  
scattering their heated ashes into the void of the universe...

Some of this cosmic dust falls onto our little earth  
carrying hydrocarbon compounds, organic matter  
able to mutate into plant and animal life,  
a spectrum of elemental fragrances...

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<sup>1</sup> This poem won the Nosside International Poetry Prize (Special mention) in 2008 (<http://www.nosside.com>).

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Perhaps on the dust emanating from one ancient star  
were borne the first molecules of a *pandan* leaf,  
a sprig of mint or basil, a vanilla pod, a vine tomato,  
a morning frangipani, an evening rose, a lily of the night...

Perhaps our parents or grandparents or ancestors further back  
strolling through a garden or a field had breathed in the scents  
effusing from some of these plants born of the same star  
and passed them on as DNA in the genes of which we were made...

Could that be why, on our early encounters, we already sensed  
in each other a whiff of something familiar, why when we are near,  
there is in the air some spark which seems to have always been there,  
prompting us to connect our pasts, share our stories even as they evolve...

... till the day when we too burn away into dust  
and the aromas of our essence dissipate  
into the same kaleidoscope of ether light  
to be drawn into solar space by astral winds...

... perhaps to make vanilla in a star to be  
before the next lifetime of three?

(9 May 2008, Rodrigues Court, with reference to Sun Kwok's book, *Cosmic Butterflies*)

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