

THE KINGFISHER STORY COLLECTION

Quan-Hoang Vuong

AISDL



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Dedicated to “bà Biên”

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FOREWORD

(Third edition with additions)

This is a collection of short stories centering around the protagonist character, Kingfisher, originally written in Vietnamese by myself.

The book aims to introduce international readers to snippets of Vietnamese culture through the ordinary yet humorous life of the bird village.

The first 15 of these short stories were published in the *Khoảng Lặng* (Quiet Moment) column of the Vietnamese magazine *Kinh Tế và Dự Báo* (*Economy and Forecast Review*) from 2017 to 2019.

However, this is the first time that the collection of all the Kingfisher stories has been published in its entirety, covering stories that have not been published elsewhere, including recent stories written in 2023.

The stories of Kingfisher are full of humor and satire while also deep in social commentary. I hope that the book brings readers joy and some food for thought, for beyond satire is genuine contemplation of the humanistic values in our life.

Also, I look forward to hearing from the book readers about what and how I can improve the book's content for the next updates. So if possible, please leave your reviews/comments on the book's Amazon page: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0BG2NNHY6>. I sincerely thank you for your comments, dear readers.

Hanoi, October 21, 2023

Quan-Hoang Vuong

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Oil painting by Dam Thi Thu Ha

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October 21, 2023

1. THE PERFECT PLAN

Kingfisher is one of deep knowledge and meticulous planning.

* * *

It is just the crack of dawn when he is seen perching atop a tree. With his impeccable ability to control the flight speed, such as when to slow down or when to speed up, he could calculate at ease the optimal way to catch fish.

Added his experience in dealing with the fish in the pond, he could tell from afar which one was big, small, nimble, or leaden.

Only by seizing the catch in its most exacting moment could he save plenty of time to muse over worldly matters.

Knowing thyself, Kingfisher plans each and every meal per his appetite and, thus, keeps track of his fish inventory. The small fish have got to wait, and the big fish have got to go.

The perfectionist he is, he calculates everything.

First come the ideas, then comes an action plan. Never mind the planning required, he excels at this—if a plan is incomplete or not assuring enough, he would correct it. Perfection naturally calls for dedication and diligence. No matter how many times it takes him to correct his plans, he does not mind, for he is immersed in these mathematical calculations.

When night falls, he smiles with the utmost pride and satisfaction at the perfect plan to catch fish.

Well, the problem is that he cannot fall asleep on an empty stomach.



Linocut painting by Bui Quang Khiem. All rights belong to the author.

2. LIGHT AND FREE

Lately, noticing that Kingfisher has been awfully quiet and often lost in thoughts, Cuckoo decides to pay him a visit.

* * *

Cuckoo says:

– The weather is great today, you, Sir, should come with me to the fields. The harvest season is near; the fields are bustling with joy and flocks of birds. Sir, if you go, you may see something interesting.

Kingfisher has finished his desert and so happily tags along with Cuckoo.

The sight of nearly golden ripe paddy fields touches Kingfisher.

There, Kingfisher and Cuckoo bask in the glorious vastness of the fields.

Standing on the side of the bountiful crops, Kingfisher leisurely starts a small talk. Oddly though, there are barely any answers. Some plants are busy flexing their muscles to counter the wind, while others are struggling to keep their heads intact or completely occupied with fighting off the rapacious birds. With their backs bent and faces down, no one is in the mood for idle chitchat.

Seeing a disappointed Kingfisher, Cuckoo suggests, “It looks cheerful over there, why don’t we move? Those guys are waving and seem chatty.”

The move turns out to be right; they finally find someone to talk to. Curious

and puzzled, Kingfisher asks:

– In the same field, how can the two sides be so different? The guys over there are dead serious, while you guys are cheery and breezy.

One Paddy Youth, still dancing to the wind, swiftly replies,

– Sir, it's because our circumstances are different. Our bunch is light and free, while those guys spend all day long worried and guarding their ripe grains. What a terrible waste of time! Beautiful sunny days are for singing, dancing, and chattering away...

As he is speaking, he puffs out his chest as though he wants to embrace both the sky and earth in his arms, his eyes sparkling with unspeakable pride. His hands clap on his swaying body, fluttering the leaves along. Kingfisher sees right through this: the paddy here is completely crooked.



Watercolor painting by Bui Quang Khiem. All rights belong to the author.

3. FAMILY LEGACY...

Lately, the bird community has been engulfed in uneasiness due to the coming of some strange Pelicans.

* * *

These guys are here to eke out a living. Just three guys, but this is a hardworking bunch, preying on the fish from morning till midnight. Seeing this, Sir Kingfisher is on pins and needles and decides to convene a community meeting one evening. Out of respect, the birds, except for Miss Stork, fight off their sleepiness and show up. At the meeting, Kingfisher asked everyone to denounce the Pelicans and concluded that these unruly intruders must be kicked out.

The birds all chime in, their voices crisscrossing one another in a total muddle. Mr. Crest and Mr. Wren quarrel so intensely that they almost brawl it out—even though they agree, there are always worms left after the fish is depleted. Little Miss Flowerpecker is chided for digressing; she took the gathering as a chance to complain about Mr. Sparrow catnapping during the day. Ms. Starling, meanwhile, is busy marketing her cleaning service.

Irritated, Kingfisher knocks on wood and shouts: “No more nonsense. Everyone, focus on eating the fish!”

Silence ensues. In a bit, Mr. Spotted-Dove raises his voice loud and clear:

– Sir, I have to be honest here; you yourself are a master of fish catching and a big eater...

Caught off guard, Kingfisher rebukes:

– How insolent! I catch fish in style and am a principled eater! This has been a royal family legacy, unlike those gluttonous beings that have no manners and just prey on food wherever...

As he is speaking, Miss Stork suddenly runs in, panting heavily.

Turns out she comes late to the meeting because she was busy stalking the Pelicans and got caught in the act. It took her a while to come back.

Kingfisher asks:

– So what happened?

Miss Stork:

– Sir, they are big and strong; their rostra are like buckets. I was so scared they might beat the hell out of me...

Kingfisher pushes:

– Quick, to the main point.

Miss Stork:

– Well, Sir, turns out they are quite kind and polite. They showed me two pieces of paper and told me to read them and report back to you.

Kingfisher:

– What did the papers say?

Miss Stork:

– One wrote “Certificate of style and ethics in fish catching.” And the other said, “Permit to catch fish everywhere.”

As the words hit, Kingfisher’s ears buzzed over, his eyes darkened, and he fainted. Everyone racks their brains to make amends. A bit later, Kingfisher awoke, gasping:

– My family’s fishing legacy is the epitome of talent, to the point that we are revered as “king.” Only today did I learn that, apparently, the whole family

has been catching fish illegally.

AFTERWORD

Dear readers,

As an author, the most important writing aspect is sharing my understanding and insights with you. Although no story is perfect, let alone a collection of short stories, some might be thought-stimulating or useful.

I will be grateful if a reader of *The Kingfisher Story Collection* can help me learn about what you think, especially concerning what I can do more to improve the content for future updates. So, whenever possible, please help me learn by leaving your reviews on the book's Amazon page: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0BG2NNHY6>.

I cherish every single opinion and comment, whether positive or less positive, long or short.

Once again, thank you in advance for your thoughts, and I look forward to learning more from you.

Sincerely,
Quan-Hoang Vuong

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Quan-Hoang Vuong

Also, Vuong Quan Hoang, Ph.D. (Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2004), Distinguished Scientist at Hanoi-based Phenikaa University, award-winning author.

He spent many years in industries, including ING Barings and World Bank/IFC. During 2003-2015 he became an entrepreneur, starting several ventures, including the first online domestic entrepreneur community in Vietnam, which he successfully sold during 2008-2009. His private business is Vuong & Associates, an advisory firm providing boutique analytics-based services.



In 2017, he founded the Centre for Interdisciplinary Social Research at Phenikaa University and has since directed its research operations full-time. He also serves as an associated member of the Vietnam Institute for Advanced Study in Mathematics (2021-24) and the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED), the science funder of the government (2022-24; 2019-22).

PRAISE FOR AUTHOR

I think it takes a great deal of courage for author Quan-Hoang Vuong to write fables and venture out on Amazon's bookshelf because he might find himself a lone wolf in this journey. Or perhaps they are written out of the author's great passion or out of deep thoughts and lessons he wanted to share with readers.

- DR. GIANG HOANG (MONASH UNIVERSITY)

I've spent years working in Vietnam and trying to understand the people and culture. This book, which I read when I returned home from a trip to Hanoi, made me a little homesick for Vietnam. It is a lively read and offers a charming peek into Vietnamese culture, delightful for a person who knows a lot—or nothing—about Vietnam.

- DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR DR. NANCY K. NAPIER (BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY)

Stories from the book are written in a humorous, engaging style. The author also vividly describes the world of birds through the perspective of the kingfisher. Throughout the book, the author uses very subtle metaphors. The characteristics of each bird represent a distinct human personality in society. I can easily come across the details, emotions, and phenomena described in the tales around me.

- *DR. HOANG NGUYEN (RITSUMEIKAN ASIA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY)*

BOOKS BY THIS AUTHOR

[**Meandering Sobriety**](#)

[**Mindsponge Theory**](#)

[**A New Theory Of Serendipity: Nature, Emergence
And Mechanism**](#)

[**The Mindsponge And BMF Analytics For
Innovative Thinking In Social Sciences And
Humanities**](#)

[**A Mindsponge-Based Investigation Into The
Psycho-Religious Mechanism Behind Suicide
Attacks**](#)

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The author also expresses his gratitude to friends and colleagues and, more importantly, readers of the book.