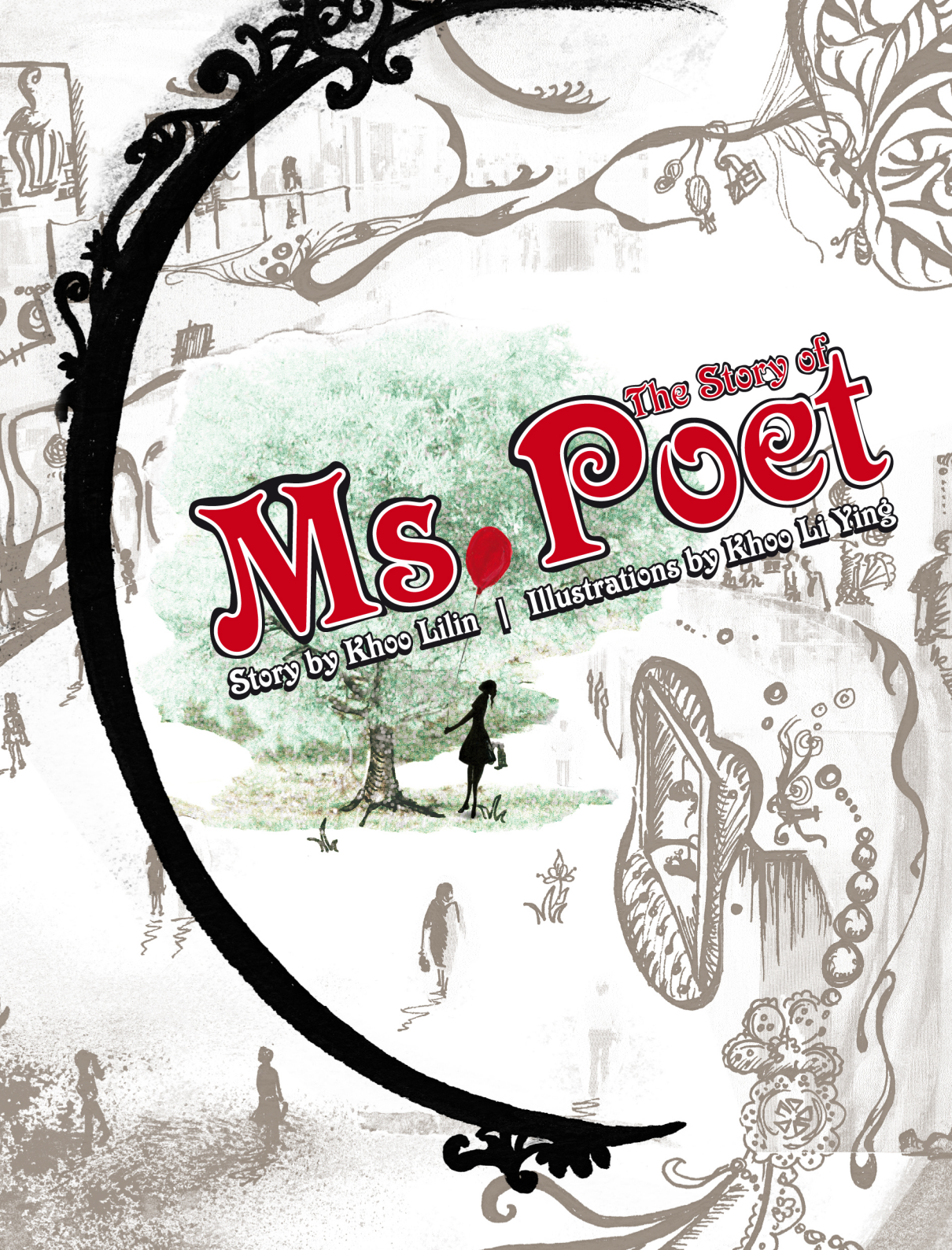


Ms. Poet

The Story of

Story by Khoo Lilin | Illustrations by Khoo Li Ying



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This book is dedicated to:

the memory of our father, Khoo Boo Eng (1954–1998),
Artist, Inventor, and beloved dad.

and to our mother, Chiam Hong Yock,
an amazing person who always encouraged us
to pursue our dreams.







Chapter 1

The Story of Ms. Poet

**“When as a child, I wrote my
name for the first time, I knew that
I was beginning a book.”**

– The Book of Questions, by Edmond Jabés

Once, there was a little girl who wanted to be a poet.

She loved books and writing and poetry. When she was six years old, the little girl was already reading eight books a day, and at night, under the covers.

By the time she was eight, she was reading five books simultaneously, placing one on the stairs, one in the bathroom, one at the dining table, and one at the piano (at which she was compelled to practise on for at least an hour everyday, and which she loathed because it took her

away from her reading), one in the bedroom, and one in her schoolbag. She read while eating; she read while walking; she read while she was supposed to be sleeping; she read during recess; she read while she was supposed to be paying attention in class, which of course got her into awful trouble. At night, she and her stuffed toys re-enacted the Midnight Feasts in Enid Blyton's school stories. Only, instead of midnight feasts in which abounded good things to eat of every colour and description, her midnight feasts were secret midnight reading parties. She devoured her books with an insatiable hunger.

When she was nine, she had finished reading all the books in the children's sections of both the school library and the National Library and there was nothing for it except to move up to the Adults' Section – which she did so with delight. Then, she developed a new strategy – she read by Author. One day it was Agatha Christie (a hundred plus titles); another day it was Jane Austen; yet another day she would start on the poetry of Philip Larkin. Then it was by genre: detective fiction, gothic fiction, science fiction, romance, the Classics (which slowed her frenetic pace down quite a bit), realist fiction, horror fiction.

Her parents fretted over her. At the rate she was reading, she was not doing anything else much and she was growing frightfully thin. Many other children were playing games and going to parties in between working on their home assignments and yet she continued to read and write and illustrate her own stories – at parties, during vacations, during boring dinners, during lengthy plane rides. When she was not reading, she was writing about imaginary characters in her head.

By the time she grew up, she knew that she wanted to be a poet. There was no turning back.





Chapter 2

And She Started to Write

Her writing was not exactly well-received, however. She remembered that there was once when she was sitting in class, waiting for someone, anyone to rescue her and the teacher wanted all of them to write about the imaginary moment when they would meet the man of their dreams. She had a rather good idea of how and when it would happen and so she started to write rather enthusiastically.

The teacher made her read it out, which rather surprised her. She wasn't one of the pleasant-faced, neat-handwriting types who always managed to churn out sensible answers all the time, and so she wasn't very often called upon in class. Nevertheless, she was pleased at being chosen and read:

I was deep in sleep when it finally happened – the event that I had been waiting for all my life. I rose from my slumber, a bit drowsily, and smiled – a megawatt smile, tossing my cascade of beautiful curls over my left

shoulder. He was sitting on the edge of my writing desk, right beside my bed. I knew, then, beyond a shadow of a doubt. But still, I had to ask, 'Who are you?' and he replied, 'I am the man of your dreams.'

There was a long silence. The teacher sort of patted her on the back and then quickly moved on to the next person.

And that was when she discovered that dreams were not encouraged in secondary school compositions.

