

Conversations with Kingfisher: Wisdom from Vuong's *Wild Wise Weird* Stories

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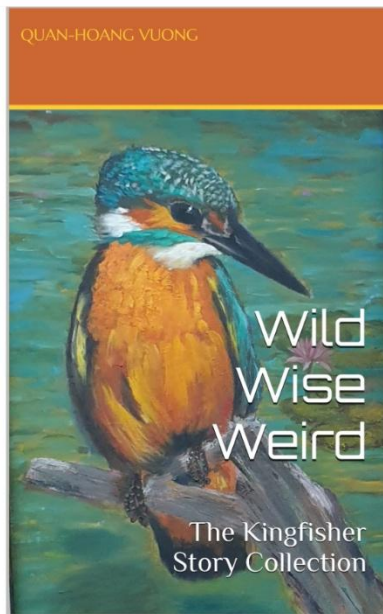
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I sat by the riverbank, watching a stork family flying back to their nest after a hard working day. To my astonishment, a kingfisher landed beside me, his feathers shimmering like the pages of a timeless book.

When I was five, what thrilled me most wasn't watching cartoons like other children in my village. My great excitement came during power outages at night. Those evenings, my family would gather in our house yard, under the vast canopy of stars, with fireflies dancing in the dark. I would nestle under my aunt's arm, listening intently as her voice breathed life into tales of fables and satire. She told the same stories countless times, but they never grew old. I would giggle, laugh, and eventually drift to sleep, dreaming of a



world where all beings on Earth can talk to each other, where I can fly like a bird, and where every creature holds a piece of the universe's wisdom waiting for me to explore.

Reading *Wild Wise Weird: The Kingfisher Story Collection* by Quan-Hoang Vuong ([2024](#)) brought me back to those nights. The book, much like my aunt's stories, captures the transience of life—the ephemeral moments that linger long after they have passed. It made me feel like I was sitting by a riverbank, not just an observer of his bird village but as someone in dialogue with the kingfisher, learning layers of wisdom in each story that Vuong's masterpiece offers.

“How do readers from across the world find themselves in these distinctly Vietnamese tales? And Why do these ephemeral moments in our lives matter?” I asked the bird.

Kingfisher dipped his beak toward the still water, creating ripples that expanded outward in perfect circles. Each ring caught the light and reflected to my eyes, like the layers of meaning in Vuong’s masterpiece.

“The most universal truths are found in the most specific moments.” The Kingfisher said, “ And every simple act held deep meanings of life.”

The wild, wise, and weird stories began to make new sense to me. In one ripple, I saw the satire that made readers laugh; in another, the story made people think; and in a third, the deep humanistic values that made them feel—and the endless circles linger after people finish reading it. While deeply rooted in Vietnamese culture, each story delves into universal aspects of human life, such as survival in *Food* (Story 8), choices in *Luck* (Story 10), and the pursuit of meaning in life in *Dream* (Story 14) speaking to experiences that resonate with readers everywhere.

“What makes a story unforgettable?” I continued.

The Kingfisher tilted his head, perhaps amused by my curiosity. “It is not the story itself but the emotions they awaken and how it resonates with the reader’s own memories.”

This is where Vuong’s genius lies. His stories do not offer answers. Instead, they leave readers with questions that linger to invite them into a meditation on life’s contradictions, such as prosperity vs. tragedy in *Food*, survival vs. greed and reputation in *Luck*, or freedom vs. contentment and sacrifice in *Dream*. With questions that triggered me after reading it: What is not being told about the allure of convenience? How can letting go of materials or emotional attachments bring a sense of freedom and peace? And, what is the

nature of true freedom—having the ability to choose or being content with the choices available?



Evening at the riverbank, Cuc Phuong, Ninh Binh (Photo by Thi Mai Anh Tran)

Through these open-ended reflections and questions, Vuong masterfully engages the readers with the shared struggles of human life, bridging generations, cultures, and philosophies in a meaningful way.

*As the Kingfisher spread his wings, preparing to leave, I asked one last question:
“Why do we need these stories today?”*

*Kingfisher’s response was both simple and profound: “Because it reminds us that
life is fragile and the most profound truths often come wrapped in laughter.”*

The Kingfisher flew away, leaving me alone by the river, but our conversation kept echoing in my mind.

In this technological era, where children are often glued to their smartphones and television screens, missing out on the magic of storytelling that once nurtured my imagination. *Wild Wise Weird: The Kingfisher Story Collection* is more than just a book; it is a vital experience, encouraging readers to reflect on life's fragility and resilience. Quan-Hoang Vuong has created a timeless classic—a true masterpiece that invites us to find meaning in life's brief yet beautiful moments.

Long after you have turned the last page, you will find yourself, like me, still sitting by the riverbank, watching the Kingfisher soar.

References

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