

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, September 16, 2023

Quan-Hoang Vuong

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Oil painting by Dam Thi Thu Ha

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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.

25. KINGFISHER'S GHG EMISSION REDUCTION PLAN

AS time passes, news about the now hotter Earth buzzes through the bird village. Those kingfishers residing along the banks of the Red River often report drying riverbeds and skinny fish. As Kingfisher casts his gaze upon the events that have unfolded, he can't help but feel a sense of unease creeping up within him. He decides to collect all the scientific information. An elite squad with a unique talent for gathering vital information is formed for emergency information collection. The team comprises Miss Stork, Miss Flowerpecker, Mr. Sparrow, and Mr. Bulbul.

* * *

The Kingfisher flies to the pond and meticulously counts the swimming fish whenever there is news. Some fish swim to and fro, making it hard for the Kingfisher to keep track. Sometimes, his head gets all wibbly-wobbly. But, in the end, Kingfisher figures out two principles.

First: Just listen to scientific news, but the environmental intelligence birds must keep the information simple. Throw away anything that sounds too complicated. Only keep what is simple to grasp. Keep whatever news that seems friendly to the ears. If the information appears fuzzy and causes the brain to implode after two sentences, toss it away and stop listening. Doing so will make the news as orderly and simple to understand as the truth!

Second: There must be a plan of action because delaying will be dangerous. Kingfisher is unsure if he is too worried, but every time he counts the fish in the pond, the number of fish seems to decrease. The hot and stressful weather also makes his feathers molt and grow slower. The situation seems life-threatening!

The challenge is that the procedure needs to be straightforward. If it is too challenging, the bird community will pretend to comply but eventually not implement it. Due to the small size of the elite squad, it also cannot thoroughly inspect all the families. Kingfisher once attempted, but his inspection squad came back tattered and empty-handed.

At the very last possible moment, Kingfisher's wisdom shines through. He is midway through a fish when the idea pops up, and he almost chokes. (Just like the Loach giving birth on a banyan tree, leaking the secret that Kingfisher almost chokes on a fish might startle the globe.)

From the collected scientific information, Kingfisher knows methane (CH₄) is the most damaging greenhouse gas (GHS) to the Earth's atmosphere. Some even claim this gas can be 20 times more harmful than carbon dioxide (CO₂). Miss Stork murmurs to him this horrible gas is mainly generated from the feces of all species. After hearing that, Kingfisher is very concerned for the bird village. Even cows, pigs, chickens have already planned for their living and defecating places, but the bird still defecates anywhere, anytime, and without any quantity control. It's impossible to reduce methane if the birds continue this undisciplined lifestyle. This concern makes Kingfisher nearly choke on fish, so he urgently organizes the defecating activities in the village.

With his utmost wisdom and the lobbying power resulting from delicious fish, Kingfisher and his task force have received a consensus from all birds residing in the village over his GHG emission reduction plan. The plan reads:

- 1) Each bird's house must gather the house's feces in one place for inspection. Mr. Bulbul will be responsible for measuring each house's total droppings and estimating the village's greenhouse gas emissions using scientific tools and equations.

2) All birds have to reduce their portion of food intake to keep their droppings in check, helping to reduce the emission under the village's limit.

3) The estimated statistics will be presented to all the villagers. Whoever releases the emission exceeding the permitted threshold will be severely punished. The most brutal punishment is prohibiting defecation for one week long!

The bird village hastens to deploy the plan. The inspection squad bustles to supervise and collect the data. Morale to reduce emissions and protect the Earth skyrockets. Miss Flowerpecker even proudly shares that she lost 3 grams of weight in one week because of her enthusiastic work. Meanwhile, worms have the greatest chance of enjoying delicious meals without worrying about the intervention of Miss Flowerpecker, destroying hectares of vegetable fields.

On the reporting day, the whole bird village happily waits to hear the emission reduction results. Most wait for the rewards they will receive. Some look around, uncertainty etched on their faces, anxious to learn if they would be forbidden to poop.

Kingfisher perches solemnly on a sturdy bamboo branch in the middle of the pond to announce the plan's results. He says:

– Our village has gloriously reduced its GHG emissions. According to our task force's calculation, methane emission has declined by 90% through our environmental protection campaign. While eating much less, the chicks in our village still gain weight very well; for example, the Sham-bird family's children increased their weight by 50% during the campaign! Members of all other families also gain weight, although they ate less and defecated much less! Upon checking their house's droppings site, only Mr. Sparrow's family pooped more than the permitted threshold. However, the village decides not to prohibit them from defecating because they seem to try really hard to eat less. The whole family of Mr. and Mrs. Sparrows is now emaciated, with only skin and bones being seen. Even their feathers molt seriously.

Mr. Sparrow's family then flies to the middle and shows the village their

severe malnutrition to prove they have tried their best to eat the least possible. All the birds show their sympathy and agree not to punish.

All the birds clap loudly and cheerfully because the emission reduction goal is accomplished. The Earth will become beautiful again like it used to be, and the pond will have plenty of fish.

However, to ensure all the measurements and estimations are correct, Miss Flowerpecker transparently demonstrates the process. There are some noteworthy points (but the whole village is requested not to modify the previously agreed report) as follows.

Point 1: Inspectors who supervised and collected the data were frequently threatened by bigger-sized birds. They would be pecked, plucked, and captivated if not “having an in-depth discussion” over the data with the inspected birds. Although the discussion went smoothly and the data were modified many times, Miss Flowerpecker still could not remember how the data had been changed after being pecked by Hawk. Since that day, Miss Flowerpecker had no courage to come into Hawk’s house but only stood from afar and asked. Then, Hawk let his five children report the data. Each gave a different number; then Miss Flowerpecker had to choose the smallest number among the five.

Point 2: After checking and comparing the data, all the inspectors found clearly that Mr. Sparrow’s family was the only one violating the permitted threshold and must change their environmentally destructive behaviors. Although the whole Sparrows family ate and pooped very little, all the maths “suggest” that the amount of feces in the Sparrows family is very high. The inspection squad came to Owl-the-Scholar for help. After in-depth research and advanced data analysis, the team contended the feces were from the Sham-bird family. However, because Sham-bird rejected the allegation, and the droppings all appeared on the Sparrow’s site, the Sparrows must take sole responsibility.

****Grand conclusion:*** The report is still completely honest, trustworthy, and ethical, even though the data are fabricated and measurements are falsified. The methane emission reduction campaign has achieved phenomenal success.

Therefore, the bird village approves the inclusion of the report in Kingfisher's lifetime achievement archive.

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.