

Mary Wiseman

**Author of the Short Story
*Deadlines***

mwiseman8@gmail.com
413.455.8928

Deadlines

Gravity pulled my eyelids open. The blonde dresser dangled from the Oriental. Cicadas buzzed against the heavy afternoon humidity amplifying my aching soul. My throat swollen, temples throbbed and the stained tracks of my tears pinched my skin. I rolled over and closed my eyes again in the hope of quelling the pulsations in my head. The next time I opened my eyes, night had fallen.

It was back in the days when getting around meant primarily biking. Experiencing the city the way the locals did. Of course, only a few government officials really knew the true extent of how drastically Beijing's neighborhoods would eventually change. I was caught up in my own world. Not young, nor foolish, I was just at a cross road in my life. Up against a deadline.

Deadlines transform time. Often while under deadline I have gotten the cleanest house, the most sumptuous homemade soup and baked breads, not to mention the cookies. Ah, the cookies, anything to delay the impending deadline. Now, ready to write about all about it I stare at my computer screen, waiting for the words to appear. Part of the magic is; the words ~~always~~ usually appear. Then it is the tedious work of arranging and configuring them into some form, whose rhythm make sense of those 26 letters over and over again.

Sometimes it is easy, more often than not it is far easier to pour some bleach in a bucket, scrub away the time or fold chocolate chips into a sugar, egg and flour

dough and pretend time will stand still while the gooey concoction bakes into delicious decadence.

The days and nights, leading up to my appointment, were spent in a fear induced agonizing haze. I choked back my emotion, somehow found the courage and shared my news with the Chinese boyfriend. Hearing his answer, my heart pounded so hard I thought it would explode. He thought I would have 'taken care of the situation, as a good Chinese woman would.' The trouble is, I am not Chinese.

Scared, I went to the hospital to 'arrange for the termination of my condition'. The nurse's mandarin was crystal clear even to my novice ears, 'There won't be another chance for you to give birth. You are far too old'. At the time, I was a decade older than the norm for Chinese women giving birth to their first and normally only child. I left with an arrangement, to return the following week.

The subsequent week, back at the Beijing hospital, I took the longest elevator ride of my life. Still unsure about my choice or my future, I slowly rose to the third floor. The elevator doors opened and I couldn't move my body. Time stood still and I was frozen in my haze. Then, as if watching myself in a movie, I saw my hand rise, to push the 'down' button. The door closed and I knew I could do this. I had no idea how. I just knew I would.

No matter where in the world you are, sometimes life just seems to be a series of stories with deadlines. Deadlines, whose energy takes on lives of their own, oftentimes bigger than the stories themselves. And every-so-often we somehow move beyond the deadline and get the story done.

It had been a quirky, warm day, for early February. A near 60-degree balmy twenty-four hours, which was a very odd departure from the typical Beijing winters. The city was abuzz with Chinese New Year's Eve preparations and after months of priming, I entered the local, downtown hospital where I filled the ensuing hours with every known tactic to labor thru my deadline.

The following morning, Beijing fell silent under a cloak of snow, after a wild evening of blaring firecrackers and celebration. My daughter's birth came on that auspicious-Chinese New Year's morning. It is a Chinese tradition to give babies several names, so as to confuse any ghosts who may be apt to swoop down and capture newborns. Thus, she was granted her baby name: 'Snow Jade' in reference to her arrival during the unusual climatic conditions.

And this was only the beginning.