

Fiction

Group 1



The Future Greater Bay

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Wang, Qian Yue – 8

The three of us, Leo, Levin and me were sick of homework, so we went on a holiday to the Greater Bay Area.

We went past the Bell Tower to the Star Ferry. Then we went across Victoria Harbor. It was nice. The sea was calm and everything was fine. Then, we went through the town and we saw banks in the Central area of Hong Kong Island.

We then went to Macao on the Hong Kong-Macao-Zhu Hai Bridge by car. It's the longest ocean crossing bridge in the world!

After forty minutes we were in Macao. We saw casinos where children could not go in. It was beautiful from the outside but not the inside. We ate lunch in a nice restaurant. We went to the ruins of St. Paul after lunch. Leo told us a story. 'It was once a church, but after many battles, it became a big strong wall,' said Leo. It was a nice thing. Then Levin said, 'Ah? Five, it's tea time.' We went to a good café and ate a lot of famous egg tarts. 'I don't think I need any dinner,' I said, eating a fresh egg tart. 'Me too.' Levin agreed. We went to Shen Zhen on a boat from Pearl River. We slept in the same room but not in same beds.

The next morning, we got off the boat in Shen Zhen. Then we saw a drone flying in the sky. Soon we learned that Shen Zhen is China's technology hub. Then we saw a small cute AI dog. 'No wonder Shen Zhen is China's technology hub,' my friends and I said. We also saw driverless cars in the streets. After five minutes, it was lunch time. We went back to the boat and ate lunch on it.

We went to Ping An Tower. 'Wow! It is so tall!' We all said. It was also full of lights. 'It's nice.' We could not sleep that night because we could not forget the lights on Ping An Tower.

I woke up, 'Achoo.' Snored Leo. 'Shhh,' said Levin. 'I am sleeping,' he added. 'Oh! We're in Dong Guan!' I shouted. We got off the boat and went to an AI robots factory. 'Wow!' we shouted. 'How amazing!' said Leo. 'Look at how fast these robot hands move,' I said. After that, we went back to the boat. We ate lunch and the one next to us asked, 'Why don't you eat any breakfast?' 'We don't know why,' we answered. The bells rang and the doors banged, and we were quiet.

The doors opened again and we got off. This time we were in Guangzhou. We went to Chang Long Park first. We played there and said, 'Ah! So nice.' We said other nice things about it.

Then we walked up to Guangzhou Tower and lay there eating dim sum. 'The lights are as bright as the lights on Ping An Tower,' we said. We went to a hotel. Got to sleep and chatted. The next morning, we got out of the hotel and took a high-speed train back to Hong Kong. We finished our wonderful journey!

Cantorian's Save the World!

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Chong, Charlotte – 6

It was 5am, new year day of 2043. I was woken up by a loud screech. I looked out from the window; there was a strange car that I had never seen. I also smelled bad gas coming out of that car. It looked petrol-powered! A petrol-powered car in Cantorin? We haven't seen that for 10 years! Cantorin (Canton-Mandarin, we also call it GBA) is the most environmentally friendly place in the world with the best technology. The Cantorinians had been using solar-powered cars that I invented! Oops... I haven't introduced myself! My name is Charlotte Chong. I am a fiction story writer and a scientist. I live in Cantorin and I experiment on solar-powered cars.

Back to what happened that morning. I quickly put on the solar-powered wings that I invented and chased that car, but without breakfast... arghhh hungry! The car stopped at a deserted place. The driver came out and knocked on the door of an odd-looking wooden house. Someone opened the door. Hey, it was Dr. Goo, the world's most infamous villain! He has green hair, short legs and looks like a monkey. He has a sharp voice and he can pretend to be other people. He must have come up with some bad plans, again!

I peeked through the windows, they were experimenting on petrol cars! A map on the wall showed where they wanted to sell those cars. I must be quick! I called Macau's and Guangdong's most talented people, who went to school with me in Hong Kong. That afternoon, I took the high-speed rail to meet them in Guangdong. When I arrived, I nearly fainted. Luckily, my robot assistant ordered lunch and the delivery drone was already there to hand me my cheesy Cantorinian pizza. We worked day and night to design a machine that turns CO₂ into energy to fight Dr. Goo's cars. However, we could not get the last bit to work. Gosh!

An idea popped up my writer's mind. I decided to talk to Dr. Goo.

It turned out Dr. Goo is not that bad after all. He just missed his daddy very much. His daddy drove him around in his petrol-powered cars when he was small so he wanted to keep those cars alive. When he was young, he was a very clever child in class but no one liked him because of his green hair. He is now a genius mad scientist! I told him about the machine we were making. We agreed to join forces to form "Cantorin-Goo" Team. After a year, the machine finally worked! To make Dr. Goo's dreams come true, we designed solar powered cars with the look and sound of petrol-powered cars. I wrote about Dr Goo's story and the new machine we made together in a famous newspapers. People then start to like Dr. Goo. Many countries now use our machine to generate energy and reduce CO₂! Once again, Cantorin saves the world!

Wonderful Train Journey

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Li, Winnie – 7

I woke up, and I was in 2035. I was sitting on a high-speed train and the scenery outside the window unfolded in front of me. The virtual steward on the train took us to a brand new world, Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao, that is, the Greater Bay Area.

I found that all people in the future had a virtual housekeeper to carry with them. Coco introduced to us that this was an exclusive butler for everyone through cell phone chip implantation, which could help you plan your daily schedule, monitor your health, talk to you and feel your emotions. It was developed due to the innovation of science and technology, and I decided to have a housekeeper just like this.

My love for my country was aroused by the Beijing Opera. Later, I was attracted by a booth held by an uncle. There were many cartoon characters in his booth, including my favourite Sun Wukong, very vivid. ‘We have been in Hong Kong,’ Coco said. ‘The Chinese traditional culture in Hong Kong and Macao of the Greater Bay Area has improved obviously. It has become an international metropolis and the historical and cultural heritage of China, which makes people love their motherland more and let the world know more about our country. You could see people of different colours in the street can speak a little Chinese.’

I smelled something sweet! It must be my favourite food—fried dough stick. I could see at a glance that it was a food city with specialties from all over the world. There were local chefs making noodles on the first floor. There was an Indian dance performance in an Indian restaurant on the second floor. A beautiful girl in a restaurant on the third floor was singing folk songs. There was a huge salmon in a Japanese restaurant on the fourth floor. There were also some beautiful piano songs spreading from the high-end western restaurant on the fifth floor. ‘After considering all the international restaurants, I would still choose fried dough sticks, which reminds me of my childhood,’ I thought.

Coco introduced us that the Greater Bay Area is a highly-advanced city in terms of environmental sustainability. There are no trash cans on the wide road, and it is very clean everywhere. People’s awareness of the environmental protection is slowly increasing and they understand that the public transport is an important part of environmental protection. Everyone could enjoy the free public transport in this area. The city train is free and efficient. It takes us only two hours to travel around the whole city.

The Greater Bay Area and nine cities have completely transformed into a quality-life circle suitable for living, employment and tourism.

As the train continues its journey and goes through the cities, I wonder what surprises will come to us at the next stop? There are so many unknown things waiting for us to explore. My name is Li Yuetong from China, but you can also call me Winnie. Let’s learn about the Greater Bay Area together.

Amazing Future Adventures from Greater Bay Area

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Leung, Hin Ching – 8

It was dark outside and the moon was shining bright. It was quiet, except me munching my chocolate chip cookies. For some reason, I felt like someone was spying on me. One drop of sweat rolled from my forehead right to my cheek. I couldn't stand it. I took a deep breath and looked outside the window... I saw two gigantic eyes looking at me and the creature was talking! It was a beautiful owl! She told me that she wanted to take me to a mysterious place. I was curious so I climbed on the owl's back and ...

After a short time, we were there. The first thing I saw was a very big banner – Welcome to the Greater Bay Area. I was more curious than ever. “Where is it?” I asked, “How come I've never seen this place before?”

The owl replied, “Here is the Greater Bay Area in 2035 and you are the one who will live here.”

I was shocked, “You must be lying. I live in Hong Kong and I've never heard of this place.”

The owl smiled, “As I told you, it is now 2035, and the Greater Bay Area consists of 9 cities and 2 special administrative regions in south China. Hong Kong is part of this new world and your home is in it.”

Suddenly, something caught my eyes. “AHHHHH!” I screamed, “all of the cars are haunted! There is no driver. It's very dangerous. Let's get out of here!”

“No worries,” said the owl in a I know-it-all voice, “they are self-driving cars. These cars are capable of sensing its environment and moving safely with little or no human input.” I was relieved. “The weather is getting hot, why don't we go to get some drinks?” I nodded my head. So soon we headed straight to the nearest shop. After we had chosen our favorite drinks, I started looking for the cashier. But the owl stopped me and said that there were no cashiers here, “Just pass through the door and the amount spent on your purchased items will be debited from your e-wallet.”

“What a convenient smart store!”

“I want you to meet someone,” said the owl, and we were high up in the sky once again. I couldn't take my eyes off the beautiful sight. “Greater Bay Area is so big and wonderful!” Soon we landed on a big building. “Why is my name printed on this magnificent building?” I asked. “That's because you are the one who designed this building and you are a famous architect in the Greater Bay Area.” I followed her into the building. I saw a beautiful lady sitting on a wooden chair. She was drawing something. I decided to take a closer look...

“It looks so bright
Never felt so right
Now this is my life...”

The song was coming from the TV. I tried to shut the noise, hoping to keep the dream alive.



Fiction

Group 2

Save The Tanka People

Chinese International School, Keswick, Isla – 11

I sat on the ancient rocking chair, the waves beneath me swayed back and forth. I gazed at the sunrise. The deep blue sky turned violet with streaks of orange and red. The bright sun lit up the village as families came out from their floating homes, ready for the new day ahead.

“Ming!” Mum screeched. I laughed to myself, Mum sounds like a rooster in the morning. “Ming!” she repeated, “It’s breakfast.” I walked into the kitchen and smelt sizzling sausages. I licked my lips and sat down on a chair. Mum placed a plate in front of me and I quickly devoured the whole lot.

As I was changing, I heard Dad shout, “Ming! It’s fishing day! Do you want to come?”

“Yes, please!” I said, jumping up and down with joy. I ran outside and leapt into our fishing boat with Dad right behind me. We set off into the sparkling blue ocean.

I could see a school of rainbow fish darting and dodging coral. We stopped by a big rock covered with beautiful red crabs snapping their claws. It was spectacular! Dad cast the net into the water. It lay on the surface for a few seconds and slowly sank. A mass of jumping fish leapt into the net. Dad quickly jerked the net and pulled it into the boat. “Wow” said, Dad, “That was lucky, maybe I should take you fishing more often!”

“Sure!” I smiled.

Back at home, officers marched through our sea village. I froze. My heart thumped as I watched Dad bravely step out of the crowd and shout “Who are you, and why are you here?”

A large stiff faced officer with hundreds of medals pinned to his uniform spoke, “We are here from the Greater Bay Area government to confiscate your homes and evacuate the village. Anyone who questions this or fights will be imprisoned.”

A young officer pushed me and some other villagers into a police car. The seats were ripped and stained and there was a strong smell of smoke. I looked back realising that I was not with Mum or Dad. Mum was curled up in a ball crying and Dad was being handcuffed. They shoved him in a police car and drove in the opposite direction. My eyes swelled up with tears. I had lost my home, I was not with my parents, I had lost everything.

When the car finally stopped, a sudden feeling of worry rained over me. Where were the Tanka people going to live? Were we now homeless? As I opened the door, cars rushed past me. People, looking at some type of metal bricks, walked around. Tall buildings stood over us. “This is the city!” I said in amazement.

I sat on a small bench and closed my eyes. Once I opened them, Mum was walking towards me! I smiled.

She burst into tears, “Dad’s in jail!”

“I know, We WILL get him out,” I said.

Mum took out some money from her pocket, “Before the police came I gathered all our money. It should be enough to rent an apartment for a few months.”

“But how are we meant to get our homes back?” I asked. Suddenly, an idea flashed into my head, We can start by making some posters! I had a plan!

A few days later, we found an apartment. It only had one room but it would do. It was late when I lay on the small bed. Creek! The bed sank as I lay staring up at the ceiling

The next morning, as the light shone through the curtains, I groaned. I needed to make

a lot more posters. I worked until my hand ached and my head hurt. I grabbed some tape and ran down the stairs. We stuck posters everywhere – on lamp posts, shops and windows. Once we were done, we both stepped back. The whole place was covered. Soon crowds surrounded the posters gasping and whispering. I high fived Mum and we headed back home.

“Boom, boom, boom!!” There was a pounding on the door. I looked at the small clock on the wall – 3:23am. I opened the shaking door... Outside was a tall chubby man. He was wearing a black suit. His face was locked in a frown. I stared at him open mouthed.

He shouted, “Cathrine Lou!”

Mum sprung up from her bed. As she saw the man her face dropped.

“Who are you?” I managed to mutter.

Suddenly, the man grabbed us and marched us down the stairs into a black car. The journey seemed like hours. We finally stopped by a white building. We were taken inside. Fancy chandeliers hung from the ceiling. We stepped into a room full of people.

A tall slim woman shouted, “Ming and Catherine, please sit down.”

Another man pointed to two chairs in the middle of the room.

“Why have you been putting posters all around the Greater Bay Area?”

“Because we want our home back!” Mum answered.

“But actually it’s our land,” he pounded. “You are using the land but not giving anything back in return.”

Suddenly an idea popped into my head, “Well, we could sell all our left over fish in the market!” Mum’s eyes sparked with excitement!

“What a good idea!” the woman said. She looked at the guard and said, “Take these nice people back to their homes.” He nodded and walked us out.

Back home I could smell the salty air. More villagers returned to their homes. But there was still no sign of Dad. Out of nowhere, a hand waved at us. It was Dad! I ran to him and gave him a huge hug.

From then on, the Tanka people sold fish to the markets.

Ming has since become a legend and hero to the Tanka people.

The Blue Bus

Chinese International School, Keswick, May – 11

I walked outside. I saw Dad in handcuffs.

“What is happening?!” I screamed. No one moved or said anything.

Then, Dad shouted, “I LOVE YOU, TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!”

“You have to remain silent,” the policeman ordered. I watched, terrified, as Dad was pulled away and shoved head first into the police car.

Before anyone could stop me, I gathered some belongings. Cramming them into a backpack, and not forgetting my favourite bunny, I dashed along the road, leaving behind the home I had grown up in. I ran as fast as I could, I felt so alone not having anyone.

The next morning, I woke up in a bedroom full of children of all ages. I had fallen asleep on the mountains and been taken to St Christopher’s Children’s Home, 21 Pak Fuk Road, North Point, Hong Kong. For the first few days, I felt scared, lonely and worried about my dad. Everyone in St Christopher’s was kind and tried to cheer me up. But I could not stop thinking about that moment Dad was taken away.

One day, a stranger came and asked me, “Are you Ana?”

And of course I said, “Yes.”

I realised he was a Social Worker who had come in to explain what had actually happened. Dad was walking in his suit to work and been caught up in protests. The police had taken a photo of him and had gone to our home to arrest him. He was sentenced to prison for four years. I was so shocked that Dad was one of the protestors. I broke down in tears and was comforted by the Social Worker.

After a few minutes of crying my heart out, the Social Worker said, “You know you can still see your Dad every weekend on a Sunday.”

I was surprised, “But, how?”

He explained that I could take a free bus called the Blue Bus. But I would have to be outside the gate at 7:00am Sunday on the dot. If I missed it, the bus might come back but mostly... no way.

This was amazing. I could finally go see Dad. I looked at the clock. It was only Friday 5:05pm. It was okay. I could wait 37 hours and 55 minutes. An hour later, I had no clue what to do. Time went by so slowly, it was like watching paint dry.

After a whole 36 hours and 50 minutes, it was finally time. My heart was pounding 200 beats a second, I was so excited. I grabbed my backpack and raced to the gates. I had one minute to spare. I saw the Blue Bus chugging towards me. It was an original bus but it was bright blue. I quickly jumped on and was given a little snack to eat. I walked down the bus. It was all full, except for one seat next to a girl who looked the same age as me. I sat down.

“Hi!” I said. “My name is Ana.”

“Hi, my name is Jing” she replied. She had black hair, brown eyes and was skinny like a twig. She was wearing a black top and jeans. But they were all dirty.

We started making conversation about what had happened to us. It turned out that the exact same thing occurred to her mother, who was also in prison because of protesting.

After an hour on the bus, we arrived at Tong Fuk prison. I was so excited to see Dad but at the same time scared of going into a prison for the first time. I walked in and saw a room

full of kids coming to see their parents. The room was old and dirty with metal tables. I looked around and saw my dad handcuffed to the table. I was shocked. But I raced across the room and wrapped my arms around him so tight he not even not breathe. I had missed him so much.

I started to ask him about prison. He wanted to know what had happened to me. I felt so bad for him in such a horrible place.

Suddenly the guard yelled, “TWO MORE MINUTES!”

I hugged Dad again as hard as I could. The time was up, the guard pulled Dad away. I took one last glimpse as he disappeared.

I didn't want to leave. But Jing whispered, “It's going to be okay.”

Back at St Christopher's, I decided to take action and write a letter to the government leaders. Dad's job was actually helping the government to develop the Greater Bay Area. There was no way that he would be a protester if he was involved with a government project. I spent hours working on my letter because I knew it was the best chance to get him out of jail.

After an anxious two weeks, I received a letter. I opened it. Dad was being released from jail. I was overwhelmed with happiness although I knew Dad would be even more thrilled.

That afternoon, Dad appeared at the door. I ran to hug him. I was happier than a footballer scoring a hatrick.

Dad smiled and said, “Come on, Ana. Let's go home!”

“But we don't have one,” I muttered.

He said, “Don't worry.”

When we went back home I saw everything was just as we left it. I realised how lucky I was to have such a great Dad in my life.

*10 years later, we rebuilt our life. Dad still works for the government and received an award for the most respected citizen of the Greater Bay Area. Jing and I have been best friends ever since those days. We even made a charity to help kids whose parents are in jail called, **The Blue Bus.***

Follow Your Own Path

Chinese International School, Larard, Lilly – 10

Tall skyscrapers, lots of buildings, delicious dim sum... that's all I knew about Hong Kong. Where was Hong Kong, though? As I was wandering in the public library early one morning, I came across the restricted section. I got as curious as a toddler in a new house, and I couldn't help pushing open the door to take a peek. *I'll just get a quick look at what's inside,* I thought. I stepped into the pitch-black room, which smelled of old wood and pine trees. It seemed like nobody has been here for a while.

I found a book with a navy cover and foxed pages lying in a corner. I turned on my light-up shirt and started reading.

An envelope dropped from the book onto the floor. I opened it and placed the letter on my lap. It was hard to make out what the words were, because they were so tiny and the font was cursive, which made it even harder to read. I squinted at the tiny words, not willing to admit to myself what the letter meant.

Dear Chantelle,

Wherever you are, take the kids and run. Launch a new city, and don't come back.

Love,

Davin.

--

I borrowed the book quickly, using the scanner, hoping no one would notice that the book was from the restricted area. Davin and Chantelle were my great-great-grandparents. I knew it all along. With trembling fingers, I picked up the book. I flipped through the pages, but there were no words. The pages were all blank. I squeezed my eyes and opened them. Your mind can play tricks on you. But still, no words. That did it. I stormed out of my house, ignoring the people who were bowing and presenting me with gold and diamonds. I ran like a deer being chased by a tiger towards the seashore.

Soon, I found what I wanted. A boat. My boat. The one that dad gave me before he disappeared. It was a gold, open, flat-bottomed boat with a rainbow flag, shimmering in the sunlight.

Without hesitation, I jumped aboard the boat, and shouted at the top of my lungs, "SHIP AHOY!"

I was bored of this perfect beautiful city. I wanted to go somewhere else. To Hong Kong.

I opened the book my sweaty palms were clasped on. A map fell out, onto the pavement. I quickly grabbed it and scurried onto the boat. As I sat down, with people screaming all around me, I carefully studied the map. I saw the words I dreamt to see. *Hong Kong*. Marked clearly on the map with big, bold letters. Next to Hong Kong, across the sea marked *Greater Bay Area*, our horribly perfect city.

I started the engines of my electric boat.

"To Hong Kong."

The boat immediately started rumbling, and soon it started moving. To my dream destination.

The next three days happened in a blur. I slept, ate, and studied the map.

Finally, on the third day, the speaker on the boat reported, “You have arrived at your destination, Hong Kong. Once leased to England during the war, and returned to China on July 1st 1997. Hong Kong is known for their tall skyscrapers and...” *Click!* I switched off the speaker. I couldn’t bear more information. It was time for me to explore Hong Kong.

I stepped onto the concrete pavement, welcomed by the chirping birds and crickets. We barely had any of those were we lived.

The first thing I saw was people. They were all flooding the entrance to some kind of tall building. I read the label. IFC. I joined them, and soon enough, was in that miraculous mall. I headed to a nearby coffee shop. Nice place to start, right? I found a row of sofas at the back of the coffee shop, so I took a spot next to a girl with a stained shirt and jeans around my age.

“Hi, I’m Adira.” I said to the girl.

The girl turned around and smiled at me. “I’m Dennis.”

“Cute name. Um... Where do you live?” I asked, trying to start a conversation.

“Here in Hong Kong.” Dennis muttered.

“Yeah... but where in Hong Kong?”

Dennis’s smile faded. “McDonalds.” she forced the word through her lips.

McDonalds? We had a McDonalds in the Greater Bay Area! It stayed open for 24 hours, so that means...

Dennis bit her lip, and I could see tears welling up in her eyes.

“Have you ever heard of the Greater Bay Area?” I asked, trying to change the subject.

“Yes. Launched by my great-great-grandma, Chantelle Jane. Nobody has ever found where it is on the map yet.” Dennis replied.

“Wait a minute, did you just say that your great great grandma is *Chantelle Jane*?” I asked.

“Yeah. Though for generations they claimed that Chantelle had two daughters. One was called Robin, my great grandma, who was left in Hong Kong when Chantelle and Susan. The other one, ran away to the Greater Bay Area.” Dennis chuckled softly.

I could feel my face go pale, as blood gushed from my cheeks.

“Oh my gosh, Dennis, Chantelle is my great great grandma!”

“What? But... hold on, you must be Susan’s great granddaughter! Then I’m technically your... *cousin!*” Dennis stammered.

“Seems like it.”

Dennis covered her mouth with her hands.

“Don’t worry, Dennis, I’ll take you back, and you can live with me.”

I couldn’t believe it either. How could her life be so different from mine? We were cousins!

I flipped open the pages of the book. The book that had taught me a lifelong lesson.

Finally, just as I hoped for, a sentence written neatly in cursive appeared on the page:

Shine your own light, follow your own path, to those who need help.

Future Adventure of the Greater Bay Area

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School, Lum, Wai Jing Sophie Claire – 11

Dear me of the past,

Hi me! It's you! Not you you, but future you. You're probably wondering how this is possible, and I'll explain that later.

The first thing I want to tell you is that the GBA thing from the long conversations our parents had at the dinner table is turning out awesomely! The GBA is an official name that stuffy adults use, but our part is called the KAZAM, an extremely strained acronym for "Kong Au Zhu Amalgamated Metropolis". That was made up by bored teenagers and adopted by adults when the teenagers refused to call it anything else. The GBA and KAZAM are bringing together the best of China and the rest of the world and it's a blast!

This is the year 2025, and I just started university. I attend the School of Literature and Art at Bay West University, in downtown Macau, and I'm studying art and fantasy literature. Nowadays in the KAZAM, Macau is the center for culture, arts and recreation, Zhuhai is a technology and engineering hub, and Hong Kong is an international finance and business center. Although we live in Hong Kong, I love hanging out in Macau!

This morning, I woke up at 8:00 am sharp by the reliable method of being startled awake by our AI home assistant beeping insistently while it opened the smart curtains to my bedroom. I hopped out of bed and gazed out of the solar window at the blue ocean and watched the gleaming solar panels on the green mountainside and the steadily spinning blades of the wind farm down near the harbor. I took a deep breath and enjoyed the morning air. Cleantech has made KAZAM one of the world's cleanest and greenest city areas with greatly improved air quality.

As my mind regained consciousness, I got excited because today was going to be a big day! I would be meeting dozens of friends as I participated in an exchange program to welcome our regular visitors from elsewhere in the GBA. That was the BEST excuse to shop, watch a movie, and eat out!

I freshened up quickly, changed and headed out for my favorite breakfast from our autochef, a grilled veggie cheese sandwich with veggie sausages, plus mixed fruit juice and jelly, all made from the healthiest organic ingredients grown right in our neighborhood. While the GBA was a big source of advanced agricultural products for export, most of the fresh produce for KAZAM came from neighborhood solar-powered vertical farms.

After that, I went down and hopped onto a self-guided Solarbus which took me to the local hypertrain station. Even though the KAZAM is so huge, everything is so close by since the various districts are now connected by high speed transportation powered by clean, renewable energy. Eighteen minutes and I can go door to door from home in Hong Kong to school in Macau!

I brought my cyberpet to school today, like I did most days. Yes, I/we are still obsessed with cats! My cybercat was engineered in Zhuhai, manufactured in Guangzhou, and sold at the company's showroom in Hong Kong, where most GBA companies launched their products to customers around the world.

My first class was advanced multilingual communications. We are studying how to combine languages in effective ways to communicate. I want to be a writer someday, and maybe write for the South KAZAM Morning Post, or an international company. As the GBA has grown, people here started talking in a mix of Chinese, English, and other international languages. Luckily, I don't have to worry that much about spelling since my auto-language-robot handles all my writing, just like Dad helped us with in the old days, but better!

After that, I hung out at the library pod with my best friends, who are also part of the exchange club. Feng Ping is from Zhongshan and is an engineering prodigy. She studies at Bay Tech U in Guangzhou, but often comes over on the hypertrain to hang out with us on her way home. My other friend is Lynn, a Swiss girl who grew up in Macau and now studies at Bay West University School of Fine Fashion. I love hanging out with different people from different cultures, and that's one of the great things about KAZAM life.

After a couple more classes, school ended, and Feng Ping, Lynn, and I met up with the exchange group and our visitors. We all went to hang out at the new Bing Bang mall, the latest and most awesome shopping mall located between Macau and Zhuhai. One of the most popular stores is Cybertronic, which gets all the newest tech from GBA companies six months earlier than the rest of the world. I managed to sneak away for a quick look around the cyber-bookstore, and found a new smart book copy of Harold Pooter! Books nowadays are interactive, and you can play a character and guide the story in fiction books, or ask the author questions to help you learn from non-fiction books. Bookstores in KAZAM have books from everywhere in the world.

Afterward, we went to the giant-screen cinema and watched the newest action-docu-com from Italy, and then had dinner at a new restaurant which served eco-friendly Chinese/Brazilian fusion cuisine.

Before I forget, I'd better tell you the secret of why you're getting this message from future you! Bay West U and about 20 other top universities in KAZAM have collaborated to create a device that transmits email through the quantum zone and to the past. The exchange group was responsible for coming up with the first batch of messages to send, and, well, this message is my contribution!

So, young me, I hope you see that the future's bright, even though things may not look so clear sometimes. Don't worry too much. Work hard, love our family and friends, and stay good! Tomorrow will be a much better day!

Harmonia

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chu, Annabelle – 10

I looked outside from my machine, *Chronos*, and saw a lush green land. I was a time-traveler, and I loved to explore. I steered *Chronos* towards the land, curiosity rising.

The world was unlike anything I had seen before! Magnificent skyscrapers scratched the clouds, wide bridges towered the roads of pedestrians, and flying cars flew under the burning sun. “Unbelievable,” I blurted.

Standing at the entrance, I was welcomed by a robot grasping an Xpad. I introduced, “I am Annabelle. Where is this place?”

The robot responded, “You must be from very far away to not know anything about here. But don’t fear; our most knowledgeable guide will explain this fantastic land! Would Robot X9 come over here?”

Without waiting for my reply, he hovered in the air and flew off, as Robot X9 turned up. X9 was white with a radar signal placed on his head. He had a rectangle on his face which I assume was his mouth. He verbalized piercingly, “Good morning! Please follow me. We are going to the flying taxi station!”

I asked, “Where and when are we?” X9 stared at me with a suspicious look. “We are in GBA, Greater Bay Area, and it is year 2030. GBA has a combined population of over 70 million people. It leaves New York and Tokyo behind on economy and technology. The flying taxi stand is there!”

We picked a white taxi. Immediately after we hopped on, the taxi extended its wings and soared in the air. The taxi was eco-friendly, with two solar power engines stationed next to it. Out of curiosity, I pressed a hamburger shaped button. A metallic hand popped up from under my seat with a freshly-cooked hamburger!

“Look! There’s Shenzhen. It is my home, as I was invented here.” X9 declared. I saw an enormous floating research lab, which looked silver thanks to sunlight filtering on top. Inside, a group of scientists and robots sit at a round table, discussing a project called Global Warming. Different languages were used, English, Mandarin, Cantonese ... Peeking at the charts on touch-screens circling above scientists’ head, I realized Shenzhen was a zero-carbon city, running entirely on renewable energy!

Still in awe, the taxi took us to Guangzhou.

Guangzhou looked like a transport hub. High-speed railways connecting the regions stretched in to the horizon, and busy planes soared past my head. I entered the airport and glanced at the information screen. It was showing how long it took for each flight. To my surprise, it only took 1 hour to get to New York and 35 minutes to get to London!

We went to the train strain. A silver train with no wheels ran on the railway. The counters were served by robots. All you need to do was to scan your face to board the train. It was so swift. It appeared to me like a blur. Within seconds, we arrived in Macau.

The tasty aroma of food wafted through my nose as I saw a lot of fun tourism places. Fancy hotels and amusement parks circled the packed town. When I got off, I followed the appealing scent and arrived at Taipa Food Street. All of a sudden, X9 started talking in Portuguese, “*Oi, tudo bem? Bem vindos a Macao!* Welcome to the World Entertainment Expo!” I observed a stage in the middle of the street. I rushed there and immersed myself in the

fabulous performance on the stage. A colossal tent nearby was filled with tourists watching a circus show. Against my will, X9 dragged me to Hong Kong.

I found myself in a busy but beautiful city. Modern architectures gave out pink light, and tall skyscrapers reached for the clouds. Ships glided smoothly on Victoria Harbour, puffs of smoke disappearing in the sky. The blue wrinkled sea shone, glittering in the sunlight. Reflections of towers were mirrored in the water, turning bits of the sea silvery-black. A tall building stood majestically in the distance. When I got closer, I noticed it was Hong Kong Stock Exchange, with a big electronic billboard on the top showing stock price changes around the world. Still trying to understand these numbers, a loud speaker scared me. It proclaimed, “Would all people gather at the Grand Hall in 15 minutes...”

I whispered, “X9, what is the Grand Hall?” He rolled his eyes. “The place where GBA governors live, of course!” We charged towards the Grand Hall as the governors approached the crowd.

One governor spoke. “Ladies and gentlemen, you all know GBA doesn’t have an official name yet. But now, we will start the ‘name-making-ceremony’, to determine what name it will be. The name should reflect GBA – we embrace diversity of political systems, cultures and languages. ” The governor stepped back as another one stepped up and spoke in Cantonese. I racked my brains for any names and it suddenly popped up to me. “Harmonia,” I murmured. When it was time to talk about which name GBA should have, I walked up to the stage like all the others did and cleared my throat.

“I think GBA should be called Harmonia because it accepts people from all over the world, even though we are all different.” I paused and listened. There was silence. I gulped. Will they like my name for GBA? Suddenly, someone said, “I like it!”

“Me too!”

I breathed a sigh of relief. Knowing it’s the time to return, I said goodbye to X9. I slipped back to *Chronos*, pushing the button to go home. As the machine vibrated, I smiled. GBA or Harmonia would always be remembered in my heart.

Through the Looking Glass – Adventure to Laboratory 155

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Ho, Nga Kiu – 10

“Congratulations! You are the lucky winner of a rare adventure to the Greater Bay Area 2030. Please join us at Laboratory 155 at 9 am on Wednesday January 1st 2020. You can bring one additional guest to join you. See you soon!”

What an amazing surprise! I actually won the lucky draw for the Future Smart City campaign! Excitedly, I ran to ask my parents if I could go along with my cousin. Fortunately, they agreed, and two weeks later, I stood with my cousin Carol at Laboratory 155, our Oculus headsets in hand.

In the count of “3, 2, 1,” we put our headsets on and were transported to the world of the Future Smart City.

The first thing we saw was a gigantic holographic menu. It had seven cities and things to do on it. Curious about what would be in Hong Kong, Carol touched the caption and we were immediately transported to the bustling streets of Hong Kong.

There were only autonomous electric cars and taxis, and much more trees and greenery. The air smelled fresh with a pleasant fragrance of wood. The roads and sidewalks were also clean and orderly — and no more garbage bins!

“It seemed they have found ways to recycle everything now. Everything can be sent to the recycle centres for recycling,” I looked at the signs on the row of boxes nearby. “Yes and not only with milk cartons or juice boxes, but even Styrofoam and plastic items that used to be non-recyclable.” Carol echoed.

I flagged down a taxi and said, “Please take us to one of the best cafes here.” “But we don’t have any money!” Carol whispered urgently. The taxi heard us and said, “No worries, miss. All your expenses on this trip will be covered by Laboratory 155. Please enjoy!”

When we had arrived at the café, we realized there were only robot servers. There were no menus. Instead there were holographic assistants at each booth. “What would you like to eat? We have all types of cuisines here at Palantir Café. You can also specify what types of nutrients you would like to have. Calcium, protein, vitamins... we have everything!” Our holographic assistant projected a list of suggestions for us to choose from.

“How?” I asked. The robot pointed to an enormous 3-D printer. “With this, anything you would like to eat can be printed in mere seconds.” We ordered our food using the holographic menu and the order was sent to the 3-D printer immediately.

After the delicious breakfast, we decided on going to Shenzhen, and took the taxi to the train station.

Ten minutes later, we arrived at Shenzhen and went into Mixc mall. Household robots were everywhere, carrying all their owner’s purchases and shopping. Carol looked around and took me to a shop to look at the latest watches with AI holograms and implantable phones which were as small as SIM cards.

“This is so amazing!” I said. “I wish I really had one.”

Carol also suggested that we go and try out the newest Oculus virtual reality headset. It was extremely realistic, which made Carol scream very loudly when she played the VR game.

We looked at a lot of latest wearable technology and clothing made out of smart fabric, including some that were 3-D printed. The merchandise was quite affordable and was especially popular with teenagers. We also had a scrumptious lunch at a sushi restaurant.

When we were done, we decided to visit a drone company called DJI which is completely automated by robots. They let us have a preview of the latest Spark 13 model, and the Phantom 12, which can both connect with all wearable tech easily. The robots that hosted our visit even let us try out the drones, which were incredibly lightweight and sleek and convenient for photography enthusiasts.

Next, we took a high-speed hyperloop train to Zhuhai which only took about five minutes. I was astonished to see that Zhuhai has become a high-tech financial center. After a look at a holographic map on the side of the road, Carol suggested paying a visit to Gree Electric, a smart home device company that is going to launch a line of very powerful AI enabled robot butlers, including a particular model for elderly people.

I was curious about what the robot could do, so I asked it a question.

“I was designed for elderly companionship, and I am also programmed to cook 247 nutritious dishes designed for older people. I can also be a resident nurse and my CPU chip connects to the hospital system in case of emergency. I can tell my owner the news to keep them informed of what’s going on, or play cards or board games with them to keep them company.” The robot said.

“Impressive,” I said. “This will be very helpful to our society.”

We didn’t have much time as the Oculus was reminding us that it was almost time for us to go back and we only had an hour left. Luckily, it only took fifteen minutes for the autonomous taxi to go through the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge.

We were greeted by a friendly lady who introduced herself as director of Laboratory 155. “I hope you enjoyed the adventure! The things you have seen during the trip are actual projects under development. Here’s two Oculus headsets as our token of thanks for joining our Future Smart City campaign! They’re not as powerful as the ones you used, but are the latest models commercially available. Goodbye!”

On that note, two tall, familiar-looking young women hurried towards our direction, then walked past us for the glass elevator with somewhat mischievous sideways smiles on their faces. Just as we were about to finally take the headsets off, I caught a glimpse of the badge on the taller one’s shirt. It read “Agent Carol Li, Laboratory 255”

“They winked at us!” Carol said excitedly. I whispered, “I think they might be the future us, Carol.”

Bring me back

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Huang, Zi Yan – 11

She saw the flashing lights of the modern skyline in her home city, Shanghai, as the plane took off – steadily, slowly. Millions of thoughts flew through her mind, some racing – pulsing like lightning. Some serene. Some slow. They whispered of her happiness, her excitement, her imaginations of her new home in Zhuhai – but all Sunflower could hear were phrases of sarcasm, mocking and jeering cruelly at her. They hung like dark stubborn storm clouds, haunting life, obliterating every feeling of pleasure. After what had happened, Sunflower was swallowed by darkness – feelings of regret – feelings so powerful, so strong she was unable to turn back into the light. Unable to hold even the tiniest second of happiness any more. She was suffering from it, depressed and torn. Yet, she couldn't show it – it would just cause more anxiety. It was already too much for herself to handle, much less her mother, who was already exhausted and wrestling the situation with every ounce of effort and energy she had left...

Sunflower jolted awake, gasping and covered in icy sweat. Her heartbeat aggressively banging on her ribcage like an unruly animal. And only after what seemed like infinity did she finally calm down to realize what happened. How much longer could she hide her true feelings? The question set off flares in her, seeming to force every vein, every consciousness in her body to burn red hot with curiosity.

The next morning, Sunflower woke up in a frenzy. Intense purple eyebags hung underneath her eyes, wrinkles etching her empty, tired face. Her stomach growled loudly in hunger, begging for her to give herself something to eat! But her body paid no attention to this. Sunflower's thoughts consumed her, those vacant, ebony eyes staring into space. Her mind lost in thought – pondering on how to express herself- to show the world who she truly was. This tranquil stillness was shattered by the unexpected knock on her door. "Honey, it's time to go to school!" Came the voice of her mother. 'Oh yes, school, I'd nearly forgotten!' Sunflower thought and quickly followed after her mother. She didn't expect much from school, it would always be the same, whether it was in ShangHai or In Zhuhai. Little did she know about what awaited her next. Sunflower's metamorphic life was about to be changed into something entirely unlike she'd ever experienced before...

She trudged up the marble staircase up to the campus, trying to keep the amount of attraction she could possibly draw to herself to the least. As usual, no matter how hard she tried, it didn't work. Perplexed stares of the passers-by seemed to bare into her. Brief minutes passed and that burning, penetrating sensation grew unbearable. Sunflower could hear the sombre mumbles of students whispering at her. "Look, there goes Sunflower. I wonder why she's so shy?" Said one, stealing a quick glance at her and looking immediately away. Sunflower couldn't think straight, it was as if comments clouded her mind. She'd always hated attention, it would constantly spark fires in her, unleashing waves and waves of dread, panic and nervousness inside. Without another moment's hesitation, she dashed into the school building, desperately wanting this nightmare to end.

On the way home on the stellar module, images of what had happened at school that day seemed to flash in the reflections in the crystal clear windows like a movie, replaying itself over and over again. Sunflower's brain failed her. She simply couldn't concentrate. Nothing, not even thoughts of home could drive her mind away from the stubborn road of her astronomy session. A whirlpool of thoughts seemed to swell inside of her – annihilating any other insight that came in its way. It had all gone by so suddenly, she hadn't even gotten the time to consider if she really was willing to do it. To fulfill something she'd always dreamed of becoming. To follow a road that her father had dedicated his life to pave. An adventurer of the stars.

The next few days seemed to drag by. Mr Li had proposed that she and Xavier meet so they could get to know each other better. Though the pair had already done a robotics global championship together last year, Sunflower could still feel her legs shaking vigorously as she approached him. The air rushed out of her lungs, staggering fear flooding them – blood roared in her ears, a deafening ringing sensation blasting in her head like a raging wildfire within. Without, a conquering silence reigned.

“Hello Sunflower,” Xavier's said – imitations of his voice bounced off the walls and echoed into what seemed like an endless hallway.

Sunflower opened her lips to speak something, “I-...” What could she say?

Nothing.

Last time she and Xavier had met, she too was just a normal girl. He couldn't understand that now – after her father was gone – she wasn't the very same person she once was. “I'm sorry Xavier, I can't... I just can't do this anymore ” She faltered, pools tears welling in her eyes. “After he left”. Sunflower convulsed, nearly collapsing to the floor. Her heart ached and seemed to drown crestfallen into tears of all the emotions that consumed her – anguish, grief. Yet, when she looked up all she could see were crystalline, sparkling ice blue eyes filled with sorrow. “My-my mother passed away in February” He looked away, cheeks flushed scarlet. Sunflower realized – She had been so crowded up with her own losses that she'd overlooked that others had felt the same too. She glanced up, a glowing rush tingling inside of her – a feeling beyond what words could describe. “Then we will cope with it together,” she whispered, taking his freezing hand in hers as they walked together towards the warm light – towards a better future.

5... 4... 3... 2... 1... **BLAST OFF!!** Saturn 10 ricocheted off the ground, thermal fumes billowing behind it. The rocket soared upwards – striking through the air into the cloudless azure sky. Sunflower gasped, this was her destiny...

Bullet

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tan, Millie – 10

Two months ago, I was just a carefree, nondescript ten-year-old girl. That's all changed now. It all started with a bullet. A rubber bullet.

I used to live in a city called Hong Kong, but not any more - at least, it's not the city I once knew. The city where I was born, the place I have called my home for the past ten years, has changed beyond recognition. It has been drained of all its colour. Vibrancy has turned to violence. Peace has been replaced by protests. Acceptance has given way to adversity. I yearn for the past, yet just like the soap bubbles from the bubble machines that young children play with in the city's parks, I know that, once they burst, they are gone forever. There is no going back.

Two months ago, a rubber bullet hit me straight in the chest - it might as well have been my heart. Since then, my life changed completely. Everything I knew suddenly turned into doubt. This is no longer the city I loved. This is a strange and alien place, full of chaos, hate, acrimony and heartbreak. And I don't like it.

I made my decision. I would run away. I could not live here anymore. Abandoning my past will be one of the most difficult things I have ever done. So I slowly get out of bed and pack my bag. I pack a picture, my diary but, most importantly, I pack courage and determination.

I tiptoe down the stairs, silently saying my goodbyes, and I open the front door. Immediately, I feel the cold air gently blowing on my face. I walk down the bustling streets and make my way through the crowds. After some time, I hear metal shutters being brought down and the bright neon lights turn off. The moonlight shines down onto my face and the stars twinkle in the sky. I wish everything would be this peaceful, but soon, I can hear the echoing footsteps of the protesters and see a glimpse of tall, black shadows. I start to walk faster and faster and I start to tremble. My heart is beating so fast and everything is a blur. Police sirens wail and I can hear loud angry voices. I want to scream and tell everyone to stop, but I know it would be pointless. I stare at the scene once more, and then turn and run away, trying to forget everything I saw.

Running and running, I realise I'm swept up in a crowd of protesters, screaming and shouting. I keep running, trying to make my way out of the crowd when something is sprayed in my eyes. I can't see anything and it stings. Just as I'm about to be smothered by the crowd, I feel somebody grab my hand and say, "Come with me, quickly!" I know I shouldn't trust strangers - especially ones that I can't even see - but something about his voice makes me trust him, so I let him guide me along the streets. I hear a door being opened. Suddenly, the noise and chaos are gone. I feel a soft blanket being placed on me and I can't help drifting off to sleep.

The next morning, my vision slowly starts to come back, so does the memory of the horrors of the night before. And yet, there was something about the room- so quiet and calm- that I don't feel afraid I get up from the couch and pour myself a glass of water. I must have made a loud noise, because an old man comes into the room and says, "Ah, I see that you're finally up." I recognise the voice. Finally, I manage to croak, "Thank you for saving me."

He sits down next to me and looks at me with dark, sad eyes and says, "You're running away, aren't you?"

I nod my head and say, “I have no choice. I hate what’s happened to this place!”

“It’s not a good idea.” He says, shaking his head and chuckling softly.

“What would you know?” I ask, unable to control my temper. All my anger and sense of hopelessness came rushing back to me, the rubber bullet, and the way this city has changed. “You see what is going here too”, I almost shout. “How could I possibly want to stay?”

He looks at me, unmoved by my sudden outburst. “I know how you feel,” he says, eventually. “I once lived in a country I loved, Myanmar. But then things changed. Finally, I had to run away because I was being persecuted. How I wish I could go back there someday. Home is home, however much it may change.”

Hearing these words, my anger strangely disappears. I start to realise that this old man has seen much worse, yet still clings to the hope of returning to his home someday. Running away no longer seemed like the brave thing to do – rather, I see that it is the coward’s way out. I begin to feel ashamed.

After a while, the old man asks, “Shall I take you home now?”

“Yes”, I say, eventually. “Yes, please take me home!”

Things change. Sure, there is no going back, but it’s all about finding the right path forward and never giving up.

The Penniless Pearl

Singapore International School, Wong, Angelina Cheng – 11

The usual deafening chatter, the usual blaring horns—nothing out of the ordinary was noticed that bustling morning.

In the midst of all of the chaos, though, was a dark hooded figure, striding nonchalantly in the busy streets of Jinwan with an object tucked beneath their cloak. Clearly, they were trying to keep something hidden, and it went unnoticed by the city's people.

The shadowed figure turned away from the crowd and began walking towards the quietest and dingiest streets in the entire city. As they approached a disintegrating building, they looked both ways to make sure they weren't being followed. Then they unlocked the door and stomped up the stairs, the noise of their footsteps echoing throughout the building.

When they reached a unit, they knocked on the door in a specific pattern. When it slowly creaked open, they swiftly entered, slamming it shut behind them.

“Do you have it?”

An adolescent boy stood beside a quartz countertop, looking expectantly at the figure, who nodded and handed him the object beneath their cloak. He snatched it out of their hands and began inspecting it carefully.

“You can take the cloak off now,” he said without looking up. “Nobody can see you here.”

The cloak fell to the ground, revealing a teenage girl with long, brownish-black hair and dark, fierce eyes. She was the spitting image of the boy, only younger. It was obvious that the two were siblings.

“Nice job,” the boy said when he finished his inspection, looking mildly impressed. He stared greedily at the gilded watch. The iridescent pearls that bordered it glowed in the light, and written in the middle with gold, cursive letters was the word Pearlmaster. He could already imagine the headlines in the newspapers when he and his sister became rich from selling it the sixty-six million dollar timepiece: “Ewan and Daytona McIsaac, teenage millionaires.”

“Where are they?” Daytona asked her brother, snapping him out of his daze.

Ewan pointed towards a room. “They're watching some boring drama show,” he informed her, rolling his eyes in disgust. “I guess that's the kind of stuff that you find entertaining once you get old.” He pretended to choke.

“At least they're distracted so they won't hear us leave,” Daytona said, ignoring him when he continued to gag.

“We'll be back before they even realize that we're gone,” Ewan promised.

The siblings' parents were completely in the dark about the fact that their daughter had stolen a sixty-six million dollar watch while their son had been researching what the fastest way was to bring it to Hengqin so that they could sell it to a man who had agreed to buy it for a good price.

They raced out the door and sped down the stairs two at a time. Daytona held the watch gingerly as she ran, careful not to scratch it.

“You figured out what route we're taking, right?” she asked uncertainly when they reached the car, hoping her brother had done his research properly.

“Of course,” he assured her. “The fastest way to get there is to take the Honghe Bridge because it directly connects Jinwan to Hengqin. The drive is only twenty-one minutes.”

The newly built bridge was an extension of the Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macau Bridge, and shortened the journey between Jinwan and Hengqin by half.

Twenty minutes later, Ewan jerked the car to a stop in the middle of a pitch-black street. An eerie silence filled the air.

“Looks like we’re here,” Daytona murmured, getting out of the car. They began scanning their surroundings.

“There aren’t any people,” Ewan observed, stating the obvious.

“Can you be so sure?” a deep voice boomed from behind. The siblings spun around to find a man with green eyes and dirty blond hair glaring at them.

“I’m not going to waste your time with introductions, nor do I need to know who you are,” he said coldly. “We had an agreement. Give me what you want, and the money is yours.” He held up his briefcase.

The siblings glanced at each other warily. Then Daytona stepped forward and handed him the watch. He looked it over carefully and slowly nodded, satisfied.

“Before I give you your money, let me make something clear,” he said warningly. “What we’re doing isn’t exactly legal, given that you stole this watch. If you get me into any trouble, I will *personally* come to find you, and I can promise you that it won’t be a pretty visit. Am I clear?” He gave them a threatening look, and the siblings nodded, paralyzed with fear.

“Good,” he said, shoving the briefcase into Daytona’s hands. Then he flashed them an evil smile and jogged away.

“Well, that was friendly,” Daytona muttered, flipping the briefcase open. A small gasp escaped from her lips when she saw the money piled up into neat rows.

“Wow,” Ewan breathed, taking a long look.

“Yeah,” she agreed. “I need to check something first, though.” She took a single hundred-dollar bill from one of the stacks and held it at an angle.

Suddenly, she sucked in her breath.

“What?” Ewan asked.

“Something’s not right about this bill,” she muttered, squinting at it closely.

He frowned. “Why?”

She continued staring at it. Then she narrowed her eyes and looked up in the direction that the man had gone. Her brother followed her gaze and found him standing at the end of the street, smirking at them. Then he ran out of sight.

“Huh?” Ewan said, confused.

Daytona held out the bill. “You see this hundred written in the corner?” she said, pointing at it. When he nodded, she continued. “On a real hundred-dollar bill, it should turn from blue to green when it’s held at different angles.”

Ewan tensed. He had a hunch where this was leading to.

“This one doesn’t change colors,” Daytona said, confirming his suspicion. “And I’ll bet the other ones don’t, either. The money he gave us is fake.”

The Greater Bay Area Adventure

Singapore International School, Xu, Ruofan Paul – 11

I gasped for breath as I wiped my brow. I had been running from the police for the last three hours. As I hid behind the large bin, I gathered my thoughts. Yes, I had stolen some food from the local store, and I had been caught in the act, but did the police really have to chase me from Hong Kong all the way to Shenzhen? I peered out from behind the bin. To my relief, I saw that the police had run past me without noticing my hiding spot.

Ever since the Greater Bay Area had been created, more and more people had become rich. Unfortunately for me, this category did not include me, since I was an orphan. My hand tightened on the loaf of bread that I had stolen. I heard a sound behind me and spun around, finding myself face to face with a tall man. The man eyed me, and asked, “Were you the one running from the police?”

I did not move. The man sighed. “Look, if you tell me the truth, I may be able to help you.”

Thinking that this man was tricking me, I got up and slowly moved backwards.

The man sighed again. “If you need me, just find me at this address, OK?” He handed me a business card. I considered, then shook my head.

“I’ll come with you,” I decided, “You don’t seem like someone who would lie.”

As we started walking towards where the man lived, I told him my story. The man then introduced himself as Jack. Jack told me that he studied law before, and now as long as I returned the food would be fine.

“Really?” I asked. I was glad that I would not have to worry about going to prison. “Let’s go return the food, then!”

I told Jack the address and Jack hailed a taxi. He told the taxi driver the address, and we got in the car. I thanked Jack profusely. “But why would you do this for me?” I asked. Jack just shrugged and looked away.

The journey took much less time, according to Jack, because now all of the cities were connected. “Before, it took us nearly a day. Now, it only takes you an hour. You’re so lucky.” Jack said. I, though, secretly hoped there would be more time so I could prepare for the coming event.

Once they had returned to the shop, I immediately hopped out of the taxi and raised my hands. Then, slowly approaching the shopkeeper, I held out the bread to the shopkeeper. “I’m sorry for stealing your bread.”

The shopkeeper looked at me angrily and took the bread from me. Before he could say anything, a police officer appeared out of nowhere and grabbed me by my hands. In a blink of an eye, the police officer had locked handcuffs around my wrists.

A few minutes later, Jack and I were riding in the police car. I was trying not to cry and Jack was trying to comfort me. “It’s going to be OK, remember? You returned the bread to shopkeeper.”

After half an hour of riding, the car suddenly braked and the driver unbuckled his seat belt. “Get out,” a police officer told me. I did so obediently and we were brought to a large building with the words “THE HIGH COURT OF THE GREATER BAY AREA” printed in large letters. I gulped.

We were brought into the building. An angry policeman stood in the doorway, glaring angrily at us. “Come in.” He said. I and Jack went in.

Inside, juries and the judge stood along with some policemen who had caught me, chatting and muttering among themselves.

“Silence in the court!” the judge commanded. Everybody fell silent.

“The prosecutor states that the defendant stole a loaf of bread from the shop. Is this true?” The policeman who caught me nodded.

“Prosecutor, may you restate what you told us?”

The policeman nodded again and, referring to his notebook said, “This boy was caught in a store in Hong Kong at 14:26, local time. He was seen running away with a loaf of bread. Three of my colleagues chased him but could not find him. I declare him guilty of stealing and running from the police.”

The judge turned to me. “Is what the policeman said true?”

“Yes, but -” I was cut off by the judge. “Do you have anything to declare before I sentence you?” He said.

I nodded. “I returned the bread to the shopkeeper.” I said.

“Do you have any proof?” The judge asked me.

“Yeah, you can ask the shopkeeper, or Jack - this man beside me.” I said.

“Witness, is what the defendant stated true?”

“Yes,” Jack replied.

They talked a bit more, but I could make neither head nor tail of what was being said.

At last, the judge cleared his throat again. “Silence! Order!” He called, even though there were no noises being made.

“I have tried and found the defendant...” Here he paused dramatically, “Innocent!”

I cheered. Jack smiled at me. “It’s OK now, er, you’ve never told me your name!”

I laughed. “My name is Collin.” I said.

After we left the building, I asked Jack again, “Why did you help me?”

This time, Jack replied. He told me that when he was small, he had the exact same problem as me. He used to steal sometimes. Once, he got caught, and there was no one to help him. After being tried, he was found innocent, but he worried that some people might be sentenced to jail even if they were innocent. So, he tried to help everyone he could.

After this, Jack always supported me financially and even adopted me. I never stole anymore because I realised there are kind people who can help you. In return, all you have to do is to pass down the kindness to others who may really need the help.

Future Adventures of the Greater Bay Area

Singapore International School, Yap, Sierra – 10

The sun shines with all its might as if it is casting a spotlight on what is happening on the floating platform. Long queues are forming to board the floating train bound for Macau.

Another crowd seems to be assembling next to the train compartment. This compartment, unlike others, is a big glass tank. A velvet rope separates the glass tank with the crowd, like what you would see at the Louvres Museum protecting the Mona Lisa.

A Great White Shark fills the tank. The shark must be five meters long. What is unusual is that its dorsal fin is pierced with a diamond stud and looks like an ear stud on someone's ear. The lower right side of the tank is pasted with a placard that reads: "The largest Great White Shark in the World fitted with the 'Star of Africa' – the Largest Diamond in the World." The diamond is more than 3,000 carats and was found in 1905.

The floating train is a World's first. It is an eco-friendly train that runs on hydrogen. The train floats on water and links the Greater Bay Area. It is an initiative launched by the Chinese government to enhance trilateral relations, cultural cohesion and greater economic exchanges between Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau. The shark with the diamond display is an exhibit that will travel the route connecting the region as a promotion for its launch.

The floating train and the exhibit are accompanied by an entourage of VIPs. They are prominent business people, film stars and most importantly, influencers. Sasha is among them. As the queues snake into its respective compartments, the crowd also begins to thin out. Three tuts of the horn signals compartment doors closing and the train begins to float above the water.

Sasha is a world-renowned influencer. She has 15 million followers worldwide. Known for her beauty and her friendly personality, fans like to watch the display of her lifestyle. From the very high end to the very down-to-earth, she is loved all the same. Advertisers like to work with Sasha because, in addition to her fame, she is also a responsible person. Sasha is invited to present the Star of Africa at the Hope of Charity event in Macau.

Also on the train is Martin. Martin is a smart 25-year-old man. He has never achieved much in his life. If not for his laziness, he could have accomplished much with his intelligence. The only thing that is endearing about Martin, is his love for his mother. His mother raised him single-handedly after his father left the family when Martin was just two years old. In his desperate attempt to find quick money for his sick mother, Martin is plotting the biggest heist of the decade. He intends to rob the diamond.

Everyone is excited being onboard the floating train. The band is playing. Adults are popping champagne. Children are running around with poppers. Nobody expects the action that is about to happen.

Martin takes advantage of the chaos as he creeps towards the shark tank compartment. Sasha instinctively feels something is amiss and heads towards the shark tank separately.

Armed with the powerful Apple-branded smart glasses he is wearing, which are fitted with a laser cutting application that spits out high octane and high frequency sound waves too sharp for the human ear to hear, Martin leaps into action. Staring at the shark tank, he taps

lightly at his glasses ...

Sasha stretches one arm as if to reach Martin. Her scream is not heard. The whole environment seems to have quietened and things seem to be moving in slow motion. In a matter of seconds, sounds of clink, crack, clink, crack appear, followed by a major vibration as if there is an Earthquake. A loud explosion. The thick glass tank shatters and water rushes out like a tsunami. The Great White Shark and the Star of Africa very quickly disappear into the sea below.

Meanwhile, the high technology floating train comes to an emergency stop. At the same time, it automatically triggers an alarm to the marine police. Train marshals gather at the tips of train compartments, before and after the wrecked glass tank compartment.

In a matter of minutes, two rescue helicopters hover over the train. With no time to waste, a marshal points at a direction toward the sea and is seen tapping to the temple of his glasses, presumably communicating with the helicopters. A few marine police can be seen jumping from helicopters into the sea.

Minds are racing. It is not known if the anxieties are about the largest great white shark in the world, the largest diamond in the world, the most famous influencers in the world or the culprit that causes the whole ruckus.

It has been thirty minutes since the start of the whole saga. The helicopters are flying further and higher in an effort to continue the search and rescue operation. A few lifeboats with marine police dressed in dive gears are onboard, scattered around in a general direction.

‘Right there, right there...’ Everyone’s eyes dart toward the sound of the scream. It is Sasha. Fingers are crossed, prayers are said.

From a near distance, two marine police are hauling an unconscious Martin onto the lifeboat.

The floating train continues toward Macau.

There are all kinds of stories that evolved from the incident. Some are real, while others aren’t. During the police investigation, Martin reveals that he didn’t mean to cause injury or death of anyone. In a plea, he says, he did what he did only to pay for his mother’s medical costs. Martin is sentenced to life imprisonment for manslaughter.

The world mourns the loss of Sasha. 15 million candles were posted on Instagram at the same time, breaking a world record.

The great white shark swims its way to freedom and the ‘Star of Africa’ is lost forever.

The Incredible Technologies in the Greater Bay Area

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Cheung, Chi Yan – 9

‘Hello guys!’ greeted Professor Nick Zhang, head of planning and engineering at the Greater Bay Area (GBA). ‘Welcome to our facility. I’ll be taking you on a tour to showcase the advanced technologies of the Greater Bay Area, which comprises eleven great cities, in the south of China, with our Hong Kong as Capital City. I have friendly nicknamed the zone which means “son” in Chinese to symbolize that it is an offspring of the mainland and for its shape like a puppy.’

We entered the gigantic venue with ceilings of a height more than 800 meters and arches, vaults larger than the one on the Sistine Chapel. We were told to enter a semi-dark room, with a giant model of the GBA looking fresh out of a science fiction book, laying on a giant podium, in the middle of it. We were smitten and somehow intimidated by the size and grandness of the skyscrapers, with connecting sky-pods and elevated highways that brought you from one building to the other. A mega structure called the Hyperloop was cordoning the whole area, connecting all municipalities. They had even made unique replicas of the sky-monorail linking all buildings together. Then, the professor began to explain all that we had to know.

‘Our new country within the motherland is a unique zone, regulated by new liberal laws that allow us free-action and cooperation. As you must know by now, we do not use currencies. All payments, within the zone, are fully automated.’ ‘But Prof, how can that be possible?’ Terry inquired, puzzled. ‘Well, the concept is quite simple. Every person living here wears what we call a ‘credit-sensor’, which is a wristband very similar to a Fitbit, equipped with a sophisticated microchip, containing all data related to the person,’ continued Prof. Zhang, pointing at the wristband that he was wearing. ‘The microchip can be used for all operations related to payments, like going to the supermarket to buy groceries, paying your bills, booking shows online, etc. What you need to do is to simply scan your wristband against one of the station monitors placed at every corner of the city. Credits are generated by tracking what you do every day. The time you spend at work, studying, completing tasks, and achieving goals, are continuously recorded inside the microchip which will send all the info to a mega computer called the SORTER, that will translate your efforts into credits.’

‘But Prof, what about if you lose it? It must be very dangerous! Anyone picking up your wristband may steal all your information!’ Jerry exclaimed horrified. ‘Not really,’ Prof. Zhang carried on saying. ‘If anyone happened to be losing the wristband, the system shuts down automatically.’ ‘Wow, Prof. that is pretty incredible!!!’ said Terry in complete adulation. ‘I would really love to try one!’ he cried. Prof. Zhang then gave everyone in the group a temporary one that they could use for the day. ‘It’s amazing! It feels so light!’ Exclaimed Terry after trying it on. ‘Yes, in fact it is! It is designed for complete comfort and practicality,’ replied Prof. Zhang. ‘But guess what guys? I’ve got plenty more to show you, come this way.’

Prof. Zhang led us into another gigantic warehouse, with rows of electronic kiosks lying around the perimeter of the warehouse. Then he approached one of them, scanned his wristband against the monitor to activate it, on which a number of selections appeared.

He pressed “food” on the panel and a variety of dishes and categories popped up on the display panel. Then he asked us to choose. ‘Any volunteer?’ Lian was the first one to jump at the opportunity. ‘Meeeeeee!’ he excitedly exclaimed. He pressed on a dish of spaghetti and selected a bottle of coke for drink. Next, he confirmed the transaction, by scanning the monitor of the wristband against the food kiosk display panel. A window appeared that gave the confirmation of the order and payment. Prof. Zhang explained in a real scenario, the kiosk would be connected to the underground food court where human staff would have the food ready and deliver it personally to you at your location.

‘Guys, the best part is yet to come. I’m going to take you on a journey on the Hyperloop to one of the most industrialized cities part of this zone: Shenzhen! Let’s go! We were astonished when we got in the Hyperloop. Jerry’s mouth dropped wide open: ‘I love all these high-tech stuff, especially the modern look of the carriages! I also love the neon lights on the floor that change colour according to the environment, it adds flavour to the carriage! It’s so cool!’ ‘There’s even a small screen placed at each window showing the current speed of the train, along with a map which shows where you exactly are using global positioning,’ added Prof. Zhang, gesturing to a small rectangle-shaped screen.

It was already sunset when we got to Shenzhen. ‘Welcome to the Silicon Valley of China.’ Prof. Zhang pointed at the buildings that stood before us, looking very grand, alike to the replica we saw before. ‘Here’s where you can find most of the GBA’s greatest technology companies! Follow me.’ We walked along through the streets, admiring all the glamour around us. There were lots of buildings, making all sorts of advanced technology – from cell phones to human genomes! There were even buildings that produced quantum computers which would operate the city transports, like the Hyperloop! ‘Woah, everything here is so unbelievable! It’s another version of Cupertino!’ Lian stated. ‘Yeah, no wonder the GBA has such modern cities and high-tech transport! Wow!’ Jerry exclaimed.

Soon, we were back in the semi-dark room which we started the tour in. ‘Our tour has come to an end,’ Prof. Zhang concluded with a smile. ‘But don’t be fooled, your future is just beginning!’

Fiction

Group 3



Sky and Moon

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Gefen, Ella – 13

“It’s not fair, it’s not fair, it’s not fair,” I cried. “I don’t want to move to the stupid JBA.”

“GBA,” said Mommy. “It stands for the Greater Bay Area. We have to move to Dongguan because a government entity hired me to work with them on a hi-tech manufacturing project.”

I don’t know what that means but my sister, Olivia, nods. We were sitting in our house in Alaska which we would have to leave to live in some place called Donwa.

“Why can’t they ask other people?” I whine.

“Because Mommy is very good at her job,” says Daddy as though he’s explaining something to a little kid. But I’m not a little kid anymore; I’m five and a half years old. I can go on the swings all by myself, climb on the tallest climbing frame and slide on the longest slide in David-Green Park and I’m not even scared. But now I won’t be able to go there because we have to move to Donwa.

I hear muffled voices but I don’t listen to what their saying; instead I watch the moon. Why did we have to move? I like it in Alaska: I have friends, a nice house, a fun playground; in Donwa I have nothing.

Soon, our house was empty; everything was packed into boxes, the boxes were gone. When the plane took off, my ears hurt; I think my ears missed home. During the ride to our new house, I look up at the sky and see the moon. I don’t understand why the moon keeps moving; it should just pick it’s favorite place and stay there.

“Henryyyyyyy! We have to go!” I hear Olivia shout from the living-room. Today is my first day of kindergarten; I’m very excited.

Olivia drops me off in my classroom which is plastered with colourful paper and drawings; they match my superhero backpack.

“Nihao,” says the teacher. “**Huanying lai dao youeryuan.**” A look of confusion crosses my face.

“Ohhh. You is new English student?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m Zhao Laoshi. **What’s your name?**”

“**Henry.**” She led me to the other side of the room and introduced me to a smiling lady.

“Hi, Henry,” she said. “I’m Chen Laoshi, your Cantonese tutor.”

I look around and saw that most of the kids are sitting on the circular carpet; I sit down next to a kid and say, “Hi. I’m Henry.” He doesn’t respond but turns to the kid on his other side and starts talking in Cantonese.

Soon, Zhao Laoshi tells everyone to sit down. She talks in Cantonese and Chen Laoshi translates but it’s hard to keep up. Is it going to be like everyday? What if I don’t make any friends? I’ll be all alone.

That evening Mommy asked, “How was your day?”

“Bad,” I say moodily. “I made no friends. Cantonese is so confusing.”

“He doesn’t go to a private school?” asked Olivia.

“All of the private schools for his age were French or unaffordable,” says Mommy guiltily. “But tomorrow your tutor will teach you. It’ll be ok honey.”

The next day, Chen Laoshi drove me home and taught me Cantonese for an hour. At first, I kept Mommy’s words in mind but by the end of the lesson, I couldn’t see how she expected me to ever understand Cantonese.

After a month in Donwa, I finally found the perfect replacement for David-Green Park.

The gears started to turn in my head... I’m a fireman, sliding down a pole on my way to saving citizens from a burning building; I’m a pirate trying to find the secret island of treasure by climbing up the tallest rung, scanning the great blue sea; I’m a secret agent, sliding into my secret, underground lair after completing a mission; I’m a ninja as I swing as high as I can and jump off, landing on my feet and rolling away smoothly. For hours I play until Olivia drags me home.

I wanted to share the exciting news of the playground with someone but I still didn’t have friends, despite improving in Cantonese. However, that morning, Zhao Laoshi says, “Everyone, I would like to welcome a new student, Michael.”

Then Chen Laoshi brought him over to where I was playing.

“Michael, this is Henry,” she said, in English. “I think you’ll get along.”

“You speak English?” I said, overflowing with joy.

“Yeah,” he said, “I learnt it at school in Hong Kong. Where are you from?”

“I used to live in Alaska but we need moved to Donwa for my mommy’s job,” I said.

“Donwa?” he said, confused.

“Yeah.”

“Its Dongguan,” he giggled.

“Oh,” I said and I started giggling too. “Do you like playgrounds?”

“Yeah!”

“Me too! Do you want to come to my house after school? I’ll show you a fun playground that I found.”

When I got home, I told Mommy and Daddy all about my new friend. Mommy said that she already new Michael’s daddy because they worked together so I asked if he can come to our house today. 15 minutes later, we were all at the playground. Michael and I made up new games with the obstacles. It was the best day in Dongguan.

We went back to where the grown-ups were sitting; we heard them whispering. We pretended to swing but really we were listening.

“So how is the project going?” Daddy asked.

“Not well,” replied Michael’s daddy.

“Factories are opening rather than shutting down to make way for high-tech manufacturing bases,” said Mommy.

“But isn’t that dismissing the whole point of the project?” Olivia asked.

“It is. But the government keeps rejecting our ideas. They say it’s too expensive.”

“That’s not really the problem though. They’re too focused on enforcing China’s laws in Hong Kong and Macau to bother with this project,” says Michael’s daddy. “They’re trying to be discreet but the FR’s retaliating.”

“Who are the FR?” asks Olivia.

“It stands for Freedom Resistance. They’re an anarchist group”

“So what...” started Daddy but he stops as Michael and I came over.

Every weekend, while Mommy and Daddy were running errands, Olivia takes me to the playground. I play games on the different obstacles but I also think about Mommy and Daddy’s conversation with Michael’s parents. The government is rejecting Mommy’s ideas? Does this mean she’s going to be fired and we’ll move back to Alaska? But I’ve just started to understand Cantonese! These questions haunt me whenever I’m left alone to my thoughts and I’m not sure whether I’m happy or sad about this turn of events.

In the end, we didn’t move back to Alaska. Life continued as usual; that is, until it didn’t.

A deafening boom sounded. I dropped my toys and ran to the living-room. Nobody spoke; Mommy clicked on the news.

“...debris was scattered dirtily: splinters covered the ground, bits of plastic and broken poles and chains lay in smithereens on the solid-rubber floor. It is suspected the FR is behind this terrible act of violence,” said the TV. An image popped up on the screen. It looked like... but it couldn’t be. I looked at everyone only to find that everyone was looking at me.

I ran to my room and lay in bed until Olivia came in.

“Olivia,” I start, looking her right in the eyes, because I couldn’t believe it, I *wouldn’t* believe it, until I heard the words come out of her mouth. “Did they bomb my playground?” She stares at me dead-eyed, serious and nods. The tears spill out of my eyes. I had finally found a place that reminded me of home and now it had been taken away from me. I wish I was a pirate or a fireman or a secret agent instead; they would’ve been able to prevent the bombing.

That night, I heard whispers from the living-room.

“But why bomb a children’s playground?” came Mommy’s voice.

“Because it creates anarchy and that’s exactly what they want. They think that when the government sees that everything is getting destroyed because of the GBA, they’ll decide it’s not worth all the casualties and call it off.”

“But why does the GBA bother them so much?”

“China is trying to push their laws onto Hong Kong and Macau. So now people are angry at the government. I think most of the FR is made up of people from Hong Kong and Macau but they might have rallied people from the southern province of Guangdong.”

After the bomb Mommy and Daddy decided that Dongguan was no longer safe; within months we were back in Alaska. Many things changed after the move; I started to play in playgrounds other than David-Green Park because every playground sparks a different flame of imagination. But despite all the changes, the moon has been with me this whole time, except now I’m not the only one leading our little adventures. But no matter where we end up, I’ll always have someone to follow and someone to follow me.

The Velvet Petal

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Jamison, Philippa – 13

The setting sun was hazy in the red sky, casting the last beams of light over the river. In the distance stood tall, glistening skyscrapers, a contrast to the crumbling buildings that lurked in the shadowy depths of inner Mong Kok, a place abandoned for the shining lights of West Kowloon and bustling business hubs like Central. The narrow streets were laden with scraps of litter that had been trodden deep into the cracks of the pavement. Tacky neon signs glared in the dark, piled on top of each other, desperate to be seen. Posters and signs were plastered onto every surface, torn and peeling with age. The wind whistled softly, gently blowing the leaves up the deserted street. The only noise ever heard in this lonely place was the quiet murmur coming from a small building in the distance. As you approached this seemingly popular attraction, the noise grew louder. All at once, excited shrieks, groans and general chatter filled the air. Occasionally, you'd hear the loud -ding- of the slot machines, the -clack- of dice falling hard onto the wood, as well as the -bang- of fists hitting the table in defeat. But only fools entered that building, people unaware of the unscrupulous behaviors that went on behind the scenes.

The back room of the casino was a mess, with papers and forms in disorganised stacks and piles lying around the room. Wads of money, credit cards, and other valuable items, likely obtained by dubious means, were left on the wobbly wooden desk. In the ripped faux leather armchair slept Heng He, the owner of the Velvet Petal casino. He lay sprawled across the chair, his arms hanging off the sides, a cigarette still hanging out of his mouth. "Boss!" Yelled one of his associates, as they bashed open the door to the back room. "Asleep when I have such good news!" Heng He's eyes flickered a bit, and opened slightly. "The patrons tonight are rich, they are fools, but very rich." Said Gang Feng, his associate, with a devious smile. "Hmm, rich but idiots. Macanese for sure. We get many customers from there nowadays, since The Greater Bay Area initiative started, the Cantonese too." Heng He mumbled tiredly.

His blazer slid off the chair onto the wooden floor.

"Who knew trying to unite major cities would be so useful to us criminals?" Gang Feng laughed, as he walked back out the door into the main casino. The door shut with a thud.

It was nearly dawn when everyone had finally left. Heng He spent the morning counting the night's earnings. Gang Feng left as soon as he could. "C'mon boys, let's get out of here." He commanded, his voice low and rough sounding. He strode over the door, and the rest followed his lead. Heng He fell asleep in his office, his head throbbed from the activities of last night, which he couldn't quite remember. He was so tired that he nearly didn't notice the envelope left on his wobbly wooden table. Someone must have come into the back room and left it there, or given it to someone else to send. No one had told him about it. Suspicious. He flipped the envelope over. It was addressed to Heng He, written in red ink. It didn't say who had sent it.

Confused, he opened the letter. The only words were "Be ready." Scrawled in again, red ink. He didn't think much of it, perhaps it was a weak attempt at a threat, and he pushed it into a messy stack of papers, trying to forget about it. He had a 'business' lunch today, at the bar, with some possible 'investors' and intended on arriving early. He pushed open the heavy front door, which creaked with age and lack of care. The padlock shut with a heavy 'clunk,'

securing the building. There were valuable items in there, that most certainly could not be left unprotected. As he walked down the decrepit street he felt something break inside of him. He remembered the days where he would sit on the sun-warmed steps, sipping bitter beer and laughing with old friends. Memories of the days where these streets brimmed with life and vibrancy hung in his head like a thick mist, clouding his every thought. Since The Greater Bay Area, the life and soul of his home had been sucked out by the greed of politicians. He could feel the joy dripping out of the streets one day at a time, painting his world in the most dismal shades of grey.

The heat of the midday sun glared down at the hard concrete, Gang Feng patiently studied some small scraps of shrivelled plants, desperately squeezing into the cracks in the bricks on the pavement. He moved his attention to some discarded pieces of newspaper, ripped into shreds left decompose on the lonely road. Gang Feng looked up. A regular customer had arrived for their weekly purchase. Her eyes were glassy and bloodshot, with eyelids hanging so low that you could barely see into her eyes. Her cheeks were as pale as the ghostly light of the moon, and were gaunt and hollow as if she was terribly sick. Gang Feng didn't want to know her name. If he did, he might feel even worse for what he was about to do. Neither Gang Feng nor his client needed to say a word. She gave him a slight nod, and he extended his hand, opening his palm. Solemnly, she placed a crinkled note into his hand. It was slightly ripped, but he accepted it. He reached into his coat pocket, and retrieved a small plastic bag; containing a fine white powder that glistened in the light. Her eyes were fixated onto it, watching its every movement. Gang Feng looked away as he handed her the bag. He turned to look at her, and nodded sadly before looking back down at the pavement.

The hours drifted by, and by the end of Heng He's lunch meeting, he had secured a whole group of new "investors" for his casino. Feeling rather content with his work for the day, he started to walk back to the start of his shift at the Velvet Petal. The early evening sky was a maroon blanket, draped over the earth, threaded with burnt orange clouds. The moon was still hiding in the last fragment of daytime, but would soon cast its ghostly shadow over the bay. He arrived before the wooden door of The Velvet Petal, to see the door unlocked. Fear struck his mind like a sharp needle, but his nerves relaxed when he heard the voice of Gang Feng, boasting loudly to his friends about how much money he had made in a deal today. Heng He walked through the door.

"Get the games ready!" Shouted Heng He. "I've just brought in some rich investors, let's show them that they've made a good choice." Everyone nodded obediently, but stayed standing and resumed their chatting as soon as Heng He went into the back room.

The room fell completely silent, before a loud bang of something heavy hitting the floor. Suddenly, Heng He leapt from his seat and rushed to see what had happened, but stopped dead in his tracks. The wooden door lay in splinters on the floor, and behind it stood a woman dressed in black. Her hair was as dark as a raven's feathers, and was cut into a curved fringe that covered her eyes like a mask. Her thin lips were pursed into a scowl. Seared into her right arm was a symbol, a symbol of the most dangerous type of person. A blackjack playing card. She walked calmly into the casino, followed by two men. Their sheer size of them caused everyone in the room to stumble backwards. They too had the blackjack symbol burned into their skin, to be there for the rest of time.

"So this is where all my clients have been going." She said, with amusement in her voice. "I blame The Greater Bay Area myself, but we're going to need to take this place. Everyone knows us Macanese are the ones who run casinos, but maybe you guys can run a dumpling shop! I've heard they are popular around here." She sneered. "Now get out."

“No way!” Protested Heng He. “You’ll have to take us out by force.”

The woman brought her cigarette to her lips, and sucked in the nicotine. She held it in between her fingers, and watched the white smoke dance eerily in the night air, the smell of smoke lingering as they talked.

“Well then, since this is a casino, let’s play a game,” she spoke softly, and stepped closer. “My personal favorite,” she whispered, “russian roulette.” Out of nowhere appeared a revolver, and she held it against Heng He’s head. His eyes were wide with horror, as he heard the click of the trigger. “Oh no,” she said. “You lose.”

An Excerpt from the Memoir of the Developer of the Greater Bay Terrace

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tam, Aston – 14

Gansu – one of the poorest provinces in China – is where I come from.

Thirty years ago, I was born in Gushan Village. It was a small, rural village to the south of Jiuquan City, next to a range of mountains – arid, barren and uninhabitable – towering over the nearby clusters of suburbs like a formidable giant from ancient myths. In summer, my younger brother and I would wander close to the foot of the mountains, after hitching a ride on the back of our neighbour’s cart. It was drawn by his old ox, “Old Huang”. Secretly, we thought our neighbour, Mr. Huang, was more deserving of the prefix “Old”. For hours and hours, we would pick at dry shrubs, chew on seedlings and hide under the occasional sapling from the scorching midday sun, along the broken trails left behind by adventurous traders in eras past.

Living conditions were austere at best but we took pleasure in the simple life we led. My older sister was already married by the time my younger brother was born. Her husband was from the village next to ours and they sent us gifts from time to time: fruit, chickens, home-made rice wine... We had been satisfied with the limited resources we had, until the arrival of televisions, mobile phones, even computers. When these gadgets first became affordable, it was the most wildly exciting time for our family. I still remember how I felt when I watched the delivery man drive up to our house. My brother and I ran outside to greet him. He was the hero, a messenger from the future, the ambassador for a new age of discovery.

It was fascinating. The world was larger than we could ever imagine – so many people from so many different places. It was a whirlwind of vivid, pixelated colours painting lives of passion and drama. It seemed so different – so far – from the world we lived in. We were inspired at first but tiny seeds of envy were sown in our hearts, which steadily grew until the branches crawled out of our windows and the tree trunks threatened to burst through our roof. It had dawned on us that we could never live the kind of life we saw on television. A luxurious dream of beautiful people with their countless comforts and riches, once dreamt of, would return to haunt those who had dared to dream it, again and again. It consumed me.

Fortune had the courtesy to drop by to visit us, every now and then, perhaps owing to those upside-down squares of red paper we used to stick on our front door every Chinese New Year. They were meant to bring good fortune and prosperity. We had a visitor.

Uncle Hui was the best of us. He had made his way to the city in his youth during his own encounter with that erratic architect of fate. It was almost summer when he visited. The heat was unbearable for the city folk, who seemed to require air conditioning wherever they went. He took pity on us, perhaps, having lived in those places we saw on television. My younger brother was too young in his opinion but he was keen to take me with him – teach me, lead me, show me the world. We left for Guangzhou almost immediately. My parents were sad to see me leave, but more excited for the opportunity. It was like the Journey to the West that we used to watch on television and I was the Monkey King.

The travelling took almost three days. I was overwhelmed with information but I learnt fast. Uncle Hui told me that this was the up-and-coming part of our country. The GDP of Guangzhou was around 250 billion RMB at the time. It sounded astronomical, like a million RMB and 10 million RMB. I had no idea what it represented but I knew that it meant opportunities, even for a country boy with no useful experience and limited education. My uncle helped me find a job in a real estate development company as an assistant in a branch office. The job largely consisted of tea-pouring and an assortment of administrative chores. Occasionally, I answered telephone calls when the receptionist was not around. It did not pay much but I was grateful for the opportunity. In retrospect, it was the most valuable learning experience of my entire life.

Every time I fetched a pot of tea or some snacks for my managers, I would hear their talking on the phone with a client or discussing business with one another. Sometimes, I would politely ask questions about what I had heard. Most of my colleagues were friendly and willing to teach me, so eventually I learnt quite a lot about the industry. I learnt to assess costs against benefits and to align interests for mutual gain. I started working my way upwards, moving from place to place for additional exposure. Ten years down the line, I had gathered enough experience, network and capital to start my own company. I named it after the village I came from. My family came to live with me. Our dreams have come true.

There are moments when I wonder what would have happened instead if I never left the village. I am grateful for what I have. At the same time, I want to give the same life-changing opportunities to others the way my uncle once did for me. That is why, back in 2016, I was so thrilled to hear about the establishment of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area. If there is one thing I have learnt from all my years in business, it is that opportunities arise where there is a readily available network. Half of the time I spend on running my business is used to expand and maintain my network. Collaboration has become more important than ever in today's world. Every day, new business ideas emerge, waiting to be developed. Every day, people wait for that moment in their lives when everything would be changed forever. I know that the synergy within the Greater Bay Area will do just that, for millions more riding on the backs of oxen.

Future Adventures of the Greater Bay Area

Island School, Chow, Tiffany – 13

“Daddy?”

“Hm?”

“What’s going on?”

“Nothing, just some riots.” He answered with a grumble and turned away to do something else- probably planning something else to get rid of the protests again.

Today marks the second decade since New Cantonesia was created- The Greater Bay Area, made from a combination of the best of China, Macau, and Hong Kong. At least what was best of them at least. And the people are outraged.

It didn’t help that the anniversary of the Massening was just a few days ago- It only happened a mere 2 years after all, and people were still mourning over the loss. Since then the government- lead by my parents- has prohibited going out of New Cantonesia at all with the reason being that all there is outside was just barren wastelands filled with radioactive decay left from the Massening.

The Massening.

I mumbled to myself, the words rolling around my tongue like a marble until I finally spit it out.

From the balcony, the people outside looked like tiny ants as they came pouring onto the streets in waves after waves, with no end in sight.

They yell deluges of abuse; smash, destroy, and vandalise government buildings; and scream profanity at the peacekeepers.

I understand their anger; I really do. And I want to sympathize with them.

But I can’t.

I scold myself for even thinking for a second about sympathizing with the rioters. It is not perfect, and I must be perfect.

And so must New Cantonesia be.

The rioters are not good people. They are not perfect. They do not follow the rules. Rules make things perfect and they make everyone happy yet the rioters are trying to sabotage them.

I cannot throw down my duty as the role model of perfection.

The big wall guarding our house comes down with our crash and the people instantly swell forward into the garden, trampling across our perfect plants, and ruining our perfect layout.

Almost instantly, cannon equipped tanks vehicle roared into the garden along with a surge of peacekeepers.

There are shouts all around me. Surrounding me, roaring with blind rage, swallowing me whole. I curl up against the cold, dreary wall of the house and cover my ears to protect them against the imperfect, infuriating sounds.

The peacekeepers were certainly outnumbered with the protestors, but unlike them, the peacekeepers did have access to the most advanced technology, and could easily take down the rioters.

Not long after, the city returned into its previous state- a perfect silence.

The past few days had just been complete mayhem. The protestors had been trying to invade in our house and causing riots around our city. Thankfully, those have stopped now, and the city is becoming more perfect by the day.

I sit down on my chair between my parents upon the stage where we hold our city meetings. In front of us is a sea of people, all dressed perfectly in uniform waiting in their rows.

Daddy opens by talking about how New Cantonesia must be perfect, and how rules are necessary for perfection. He then talks about the protests that have been happening and the people causing imperfection in our society. Then the main part finally starts.

“We all have gathered today to see what happens if we allow imperfection. Right here, are all the people that have invaded our houses and committed several crimes against the rules.” He says while signalling to the servants on the side, that brought out the protestors in batches, gagged and tied up so they don’t resist. Some try to anyways but were quickly dealt with by the peacekeepers.

“These people tried to sabotage our society by causing imperfection, and they are a danger to us,” Daddy continued, “And so they must be punished.”

As soon as he finished his sentence, matches were thrown at the bundled up rioters and instantly burst into blazing flames that licked at their faces.

I can’t wait until this is over so we can go back to our home, away from all this imperfection.

A Whole Different World

King George V School, Wong, Adelaide – 11

Soaring mountains pierced the sky as the sun rose from its slumber. A gentle breeze filled the air, rustling the leaves of nearby trees. The sky gradually changed color, from ultramarine to soft yellows to bright blues. A lone figure, resting her head on the windowsill, gazed up at the floating clouds flitting through the sky. “Nessa, time for school!” came a muffled voice from behind the clatter of pots and pans. Sighing softly, she slipped downstairs and out the front yard. Nessa ambled through the ankle-high green grass, humming a soft tune to herself all the way to school.

“Alright, class! Today we will recap some information on the GBA!” chirped the teacher. All the students leaned forward eagerly on the rickety desks as their teacher began the lesson. “The GBA, also known as the Greater Bay Area, is one of the world’s biggest regions and is made out of Hong Kong, Macau and parts of Southern China. In the region, we have more land than Switzerland, more people than Canada and lots more job opportunities than Australia. This keeps the region well-kept, wealthy and it’s people employed.” Their teacher added. Nessa flipped the pages of the textbook and stared at weathered pictures of towering skyscrapers lit against a twilight sky, soaring planes leaving trails through the sky as they cut through clouds, and dozens and dozens of buildings packed together. There were pictures of a massive amount of people cramming into a wide street, luminous neon signs dotted along highways, and dozens of sleek, shiny cars zooming down spiraling highways. “Wow,” she breathed softly. “I’d give anything to go there myself.” As she whispered to herself, a spiral of black streamed out of the book and enveloped Nessa in it, then sucking her briskly into a vortex of nothingness.

Thud! Nessa groaned and opened her eyes and sat up, her back cracking from the impact. Her head swiveled around, trying to focus on the fuzzy purple and black and yellow colors spinning around her. Trying to stand up, she tottered around like a baby foal taking its first steps. She collapsed again as the world spun around and around like a speeding carousel.

“Little girl, are you lost?” came a soft, soothing, kind voice next to her.

“Huh? Where am I?” she mumbled, rubbing her eyes. Trying to look at the speaker, she only glimpsed a curve of a leg and a brown shoe tip.

“Are you alright? But if you really want to know, this is Central, on Hong Kong Island. Hong Kong is part of the GBA, but you must already know that. It’s 12th February 2030,” the voice explained.

“What? This is the GBA?” Nessa yelped, pushing the hair out of her face, and whirling in shock. Whoever was speaking was in fact, right. Soaring skyscrapers climbed into the moonlit sky while gleaming planes zoomed in and out of them, gliding through the sky like cheetahs with wings. Streetlamps and building lights glowed from afar like twinkling fireflies flitting through the night sky. Neon signs beamed out at the lustrous cars zipping down the twisting highways. Dozens of little people rambled down the streets below, but her vantage point was from so high they seemed like tiny ants. Thousands of buildings stood opposite of the azure ocean, lit against the night sky like fireworks at midnight. The sapphire sea lapped at the shore slowly and calmly, like a cat licking at a bowl of water. “Wow...” Nessa trailed... “It’s even more beautiful than I ever thought it was.”

“Look closer,” replied the voice somberly.

Nessa peered closer at the city and soon noticed why the speaker sounded so sorrowful. The speeding, gleaming cars emitted trails of smoke, and the building shot clumps of thick smog into the air out of their chimneys. Hurling planes tore holes of gray into a blanket of deep indigo. The streets were covered in a dense quilt of gray fog and every person out was covering their faces as best as they could and coughed every couple seconds.

“So this is what will become of the GBA? One of the world’s busiest regions? The place with oh so many jobs and land and people?” Nessa asked in horror, understanding how bad the situation was here in the big city.

“I’m afraid so. It’s not very clean around here and it’s constantly polluted. Many diseases arise from the terrible impurity around here. But people like me are trying to change it and make this a beautiful place once more. Here take my card, call me if you have questions later.” The speaker stuffed a piece of paper into her hand and stood up to leave. “I’m late for a terribly important interview and I don’t want to keep the press waiting. You can ask me later about the situation.”

Nessa stood up and brushed the dust off her dress, turning around to face the person who’d been so kind to her. The speaker, a young woman who didn’t look a day over 20, stared at her in shock with incredibly familiar brown eyes. She immediately recognized the olive-brown skin, the soft features of the woman’s face and soft black hair fluttering down her back. Looking down at the card in confusion, she quickly realized who this young woman was.

NESSA GREEN
Environmentalist

“If you’re you and I’m you...” sputtered the older Nessa in bewilderment. “Does this mean what happened 10 years ago... is real?” She spun around on her heel and walked away.

Nessa stared at the receding figure, strolling into the darkness, suddenly feeling puzzled and unsure about what the older version of her had just said. “I wish I could go home. Back to reality and.. and...” she pleaded to herself. A bright flash of light suddenly appeared as she shielded her eyes from the radiant light. The light spread and spread until it reached her and swallowed her back into the whirl of pitch-black darkness.

“Nessa Green! Wake up this instant!” came a loud, stern voice. Nessa jolted upright and found herself looking into the face of her teacher, both worried and irritated at the same time.

“What happened?” Nessa breathed heavily.

“Well, you fell asleep during the lesson and didn’t wake up even when I called you to answer a question. That’s very strange of you to do because you’ve always been a model student and have never done this before. I expect you to maintain your consciousness during my lessons, Nessa,” the teacher replied strictly. “I’m so sorry! I didn’t know what came over me!” begged Nessa, staring pleadingly at her teacher. “It’s alright, just don’t ever do that again.” snapped the schoolteacher. She unclenched her hand as the teacher spun away and went back to the desk in front. Inside was a small piece of paper, shaped like a business card. She unfolded it and saw her name above the word *environmentalist*. *So it wasn’t a dream*, she whispered to herself. Staring up at the cloudless, clear blue skies out the window, Nessa made a promise to herself. *While this world might not be the most beautiful place in every little nook and cranny, I promise myself that’ll I’ll change part of it. I promise.*

The Love from Prosperity, the Prosperity from Love

Sacred Heart Canossian College, Chow, Hang Hei – 13

She peeked through the curtains, staring into a world of luminous light, lost, in her mind. Aredhel was a village girl, and she was mute. Since her birth she had been taught to be obedient, and to farm. She was never provided real education, though, for again, she was a girl.

But she did have a dream, a beautiful and sweet dream that she yearned for in the deepest darkness—she yearned to be free of the shackles from her world, that she was worthless as a girl, who could not even talk. How fervent her wish was, that she wished, to learn.

And so Aredhel prayed every day, to the dim moon and the shining stars, secretly and silently.

It was one day when her brother came to her, and brought her away from her childhood home, and led her to a strange dwelling--he called it the Greater Bay Area, with more land than Switzerland, more people than Canada, and more business activities than the whole of Australia.

So it was that Aredhel came to a place so unlike her village, of light, of people, of prosperity.

Aredhel woke up with a start, and went to the window. She looked down through the curtains and stared into a world of light, that never had she witnessed before. Other skyscrapers came into sight as she innocently waved at the residents through the glass. She was silent, but her silence could not conceal her curiosity nor her joy.

Aredhel raced to her brother for breakfast, after she dressed up for the day. She was quite ready for a little adventure today, and while gobbling up her food she looked at her brother, begging him to take her out for a walk. She could not talk, no she could not, but her soul could speak with her eyes.

The advertising lights shone and dazzled, while the displays of the streets blinded Aredhel with their numerous colours. Aredhel looked up at the sky, and laughed and cried, though no sound came from her mouth. The skyscrapers scrambled into view and cast a long shadow on her face, while they faced each other, window to window, door to door. The voices of different people rang beside her, melodic, and the rustling sounds of cars conjured her attention, Cars, cars. She had only seen cows and horses in the village, but never had she seen a car. Aredhel's eyes widened with marvel and she counted every single car that passed by. She nudged her brother--maybe he could get a car for her. Red, she had always fancied red. If she had a car, she would get a red one. The shadows of the people fell continuously onto her, but she did not mind. She stood silently and watched, until her brother called her.

Hong Kong, recalled Aredhel from her brother. This was Hong Kong. She liked this city, it was lively and diversified, that all colours merged together. There were traditional Chinese buildings of all sorts that were similar to those in her village, but she gave her liking rather to the tall European-styled architecture. It was the veranda which she liked most. The ferry pier and terminal came in next, for she loved the weathering breeze which swept over her face. Macau, she mouthed after her brother, there was a ferry to Macau in the terminal. Unleashing her imagination, Aredhel started to dream. Her brother said it was a city of casinos and, well, swag. It was as well a city of peace and green scenery, and of a sense of European classics, as it was once a Portuguese colony. But more did she look forward to the express rail links forth and back the Greater Bay Area. The most comfortable and the quickest trains, probably. What's more, it was the skyscrapers which had filled her heart with passion, of all the technology Aredhel had never known, of all the new sights she had never seen, of all the new words she had ever heard.

One day, Aredhel thought, I am going to work here.

But it had been too long a time, that Aredhel began to feel the quick pace of life, and she was too tired. She doubted if she could labour in the Greater Bay Area any longer, but she was not content on leaving.

Her brother, now she knew, had came here for work, and to earn a stable income to support their family. He could not possibly leave. She had to go alone.

So Aredhel packed her belongings, and waited in her bedroom.

She waited.

And waited.

And waited.

She did not know what to do.

At last, she decided to take a stroll in town before she would leave.

Aredhel headed to the streets. It was the same, so prosperous, so loud, so hurrying. She stood silently, and none heeded her. But she then saw, a shadow, there around the corner there was a man with a violin in hand. A violin, she had seen one long ago, and it was not new, but a mysterious power pushed her over, and she went to him.

He played his violin softly, his music that could make an angel cry. There were a few spectators around him, gossiping apparently, or so she guessed, for they hurried away swiftly after the music stopped. Aredhel took out a coin, all that she had, and put it into his hat in the front.

The violinist smiled and took out a piece of cardboard paper.

Thank you, he wrote, I am mute. I cannot talk.

Something stirred in Aredhel's belly. A sense of belonging in this ever-running society.

So am I, she signaled with her hands, you play brilliantly.

He laughed silently.

Few has ever complimented my music, he wrote. They are too quick to leave.

Yes, Aredhel thought, society runs too fast.

But why are you still performing, she signaled, even, if you hardly have an audience?

Yes, he wrote. The society is too quick-moving. All they value is time, and yes, I hardly have an audience. But little girl, you have overlooked the world. Why, indeed, is society so fast-moving?

Aredhel thought, nonetheless she did not understand.

The world is not cruel, he wrote, that you may think those people hardly care about a soul but only themselves, and they never get involved with others' business. Yes, they seem not to care, but rather, they are the ones who really care. They are quick because of love, love for their families that they have to support their living; love for their society that they have worked so hard for it, sparing never effort; love for others, that help often goes unseen.

Aredhel looked up at him as the violinist continued.

Help goes unseen and unheard, as love does. Tragic though it may seem, but some days, here he laughed. I receive a mysterious fund with a letter of appreciation, if I have got it correct. For the people here, they prefer to go hidden in all ways, even in their words. But help is still bestowed in this society, silently and secretly, out of nowhere you receive it, and that, is the greatest love of all.

Aredhel stared at him, motionless. Perhaps this society as not as she had depicted. Waving farewell, she headed to her shared apartment with her brother, thinking all over the violinist's words.

Madam, a voice rang beside her. You dropped your wallet.

Aredhel gasped and went back to her senses. A woman held her wallet in hand. She handed it over, smiling, and left.

Aredhel was left to think. Love often goes unseen, she repeated with her heart, unheard, unthought, but it is still there, beating, believing and enduring in these thriving cities. She could not ask for more.

And Aredhel stayed in town, in Hong Kong, the Greater Bay Area. Finally was her dream fulfilled, her beautiful and sweet dream. She longed to learn, but now she had learnt the greatest lesson of all, that love endures in all hearts, though unseen, unheard, untouched, even in a society of fast-running gold. But if so, my friend, those places are the greatest places of all.

Anywhere Else

Shanghai American School (Pudong), Cheng, Jai-an Zoe – 11

“Nova! I need the... the... the thing with the sharp point and strange screwdriver thing.”

My mother’s call bounced along the walls and traveled to my room. I sighed as I rose to my feet and grabbed the tool. “It’s called a *twodriver*. They were designed to help work with small objects.”

“I know that,” my mother grumbled as I approached. She took the tool and kept trying to fix her old motorcycle. It was barely functional, an old set of pipes on wheels from sometime in the 1980s. It was easy to see that she wasn’t going to get it fixed.

I looked up at the clock hanging high on the wall. It read 2:12. “I’m going to go outside. I’m supposed to meet Jeremy in 3 minutes.”

My mother nodded absentmindedly. I grabbed my coat and headed out the door.

I hadn’t really arranged to meet with my best friend, Jeremy Wang, that day. I’d just needed an excuse to go outside. As soon as I was on the sidewalk, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, letting the sunshine envelop me. It was a perfect day — just enough light to brighten your feelings, the temperature right in between too hot and too cold. The Greater Bay Area was like that in the spring, more often than not.

The Greater Bay Area wasn’t a very good name for our region. It was nothing like the actual Bay Area in America. When the government was naming it, there were a lot of disputes. Most people liked the name Cantonesia since a lot of the people there spoke Cantonese. But, somehow, we ended up using the name Makonga. I used the name often. Nobody else really called it that, though, even if it made much more sense than the Greater Bay Area.

As much as I loathed the name, I had to admit that it was amazing there. Before we had Makonga, it had felt like the country was broken. It wasn’t unified. After we really started working on making it a reality, it was like everyone was just connecting over the region. Everyone was saying, “If we could accomplish this, then we must be able to come to other agreements.”

But even though Makonga was great, the people were no different from people in any other place. Some people were arrogant and selfish; this was unavoidable. Some people were modest and selfless; this too was unavoidable. Some people outside of Makonga would assume that it was a perfect paradise or financial center, thereby unintentionally expecting the kids to be either perfectly mature or all business. Makonga was not like that at all. The kids were just like any other kids. We jumped rope and skipped stones, did anything that any other kids would do. We didn’t leave our little bubbles of comfort.

As I walked past the main fountain in the Moonstone Park, I noticed that there were construction workers standing around it. They seemed to be discussing something. I was an ambivert, sometimes having trouble talking to strangers, but my curiosity won over. I approached them tentatively and gathered my words in my throat. Then I asked in my best Cantonese, “What’s going on here?”

One of the workers winced, and it was clear that I’d minced a word. Another worker answered. “There’s something clogging the filter, and we really have no idea what it is.”

I quickly translated it to English in my head. “So when should we expect this be fixed?”

“Maybe next week,” one of the workers replied. “We’re still working on getting it out.”

I nodded, biting my lip. *The fountain never gets clogged. Something’s fishy about this.* Makonga had a lot of advanced technology, including anti-clog systems. They sounded weird, but they were useful. There were also leak detectors and solar towers, wind turbines and committee machines. There were a lot of things. Complicated things, but also simple things. And one of those things was a foolproof anti-clog system for the fountains.

I kept walking. Away from the dysfunctional fountain. Away from my fibs. Away from my mother’s need to cling to her motorcycle, to cling to the past, which I had already abandoned but couldn’t quite shake.

The thing was, I also tended to cling to the past. And I’d never liked it. I’d tried to move past it multiple times, but to no avail. It was like a boomerang. You threw it and it always returned. I kept feeling nostalgic of the few days I remembered from before Makonga, before all of this.

Of course, that was not to say that they were great days. All I remembered was struggling. It was the only thing I was old enough to remember. But there were joys to be found in pain. All the factories would suspend work and we’d be released from school whenever the chairman visited. On those days, I could enjoy seeing clear blue skies and empty roads. In Makonga, the chairman never visited. Instead, there were drones that would fly around to videotape the city once a year. Clear blue skies were an everyday thing there, but having no school was what I really remembered enjoying about when Makonga didn’t exist.

There were times, however, that things felt no different than how they’d felt before. I went to school with the same kids. I had the same friends. They were exactly as smart as before, some more than others. Nothing had changed. Nothing was different.

Nothing was new.

We had just taken a region and given it a name. We’d added advanced technology, but that didn’t make it a whole new place. Makonga, I realized, was the same as any other place when you looked closer.

Everyone’s lives were the same. Friends, homework, stress, health problems, politics. Every interaction stayed the same, every good deed immortalized, just like anything that would happen in Canada, the Himalayas, the United States, Switzerland. Anyone could see the façade of the busy, rushed city life. It took some thinking to see the happiness and bonding that took place within the steel-reinforced boundaries.

The Greater Bay Area wasn’t just greater. It was very similar to everywhere else, anywhere else.

I stopped walking. It was incredible how much I could realize in one stroll through the park. All this because my mother wanted to fix an old motorcycle. I wondered whether she’d made any progress while I’d been gone. Part of me doubted it, but the other part of me, the quiet, less assertive part, was hopeful she’d succeed. After all, we always needed memories of the past to realize how consistent our lives had been.

Suddenly, I heard the unmistakable sound of water starting, then the quick increase in speed as it began splashing down onto the stone surface. I smiled in spite of myself. The fountain was working again.

Dream, If You Can

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Cheng, Yi Shien – 14

Dreamer.

He wakes, startled, the single word hanging on his lips.

Staring at the dark ceiling closing in on him, he doesn't understand. For a moment, he forgets where he is. Who he is.

Then the bed senses his stirring and rises, the blinds unfolding streams of sunlight by the dawn. So this is how the day begins. His mind drifts as he presses his fingers to the window, and it seems as if the word is painted over the dreamy bronze-blue sky, but the thought is soon dismissed. Everyone was dreaming nowadays. It was a world of opportunity, after all, living here in the Greater Bay Area, a golden region spanning Southern China, Macau and Hong Kong. The cutting edge technology and new lifestyle, the convenient communications and innovative population, the healthy eco-friendly hub striving for progress... and so far as the eye could see, a Bay that transformed the land and marked distinct civilization.

It is an opportunity for him too, today. The opportunity to explore this city, Shenzhen, and make the most out of a day.

He hovers down the street in a transporter, gliding on the circular plate, processing everything through his eye lens. There are plenty of new strangers everywhere, their little IDs hovering above their heads like tiny thumbtacks. Of course, the lens shows more, with flashy advertisements popping up as he walks past stores, displaying the weather - it was a dry region since Climate Change made its impact.

Everything's personalised now. Projectable outfits that reflected your mood, AR worlds where people could create a fantasy of their imagination, robots that served to your every command and were sleeping subjects to the numbing world around them. Dare to dream! That was the slogan of the New Future.

He roams these streets alone in the ocean of people, feeling empty. You're afraid, he whispers to no one in particular. You're afraid of interactions and relationships and people. You don't understand.

But he is a wanderer, and he must go on.

He happens by an eco-friendly sharing park, catching two children over a conversation. They wore the look of the advanced students - ever since personalized education took hold of trends, students studied at their own capabilities and pace, specialized in their interests - with the familiar white hoodie and e-badge.

"Life maintenance here is expensive, alright. But it's a beautiful place, I'll give you that."

"Stressful. With innovation, competition is intense! Weekends, weekdays, holidays, you know we have to work. It's worth it, though."

"It's progress. And it comes at a price. Our effort... it'll pay off, won't it?"

Children, he thinks, intellectuals but children in the mind, children at heart. They don't know. Progress? It walks ahead, proud in its march, leaving all in the dust of its dreams. And all these people, they're trying to catch the moments but they never have the time for life, trying to find some fulfillment. Perhaps humans are all lonely.

"Mei mei, when I was your age..." Yet he still sees some old folk stories, the legendary stories of the first innovators who founded the Greater Bay... "Ba! Back then when they still

used cash, those heavy and... such physical outdated methods. And cell phones! Too old, children nowadays don't want to hear about those." Well, now it was all a matter of touches and the use of the standard digital currency. The Bay was all about connectivity and progress now. It would be a burden to rely on such physical and primitive exchanges.

"It's important to remember the roots of history. At least some culture from the original city was preserved. I heard the Guanian Ancient Town remained mostly untouched."

This century was thriving, there was no doubt of that. Imports, exports. The rise of new technologies, attracting foreign talent... you name it.

He wanders to the ports, watching ancient container ships lie like tombstones by the harbour, memories by the water, waiting silently. For what, no one seems to know. Next to them the aqua-spaceships, shining in the simmering sun.

Nobody gives him a second glance. He is nothing but one in a crowd, lost in the wave of societal forces. He can hear their thoughts, from the back of his mind, see their comments on social media, flick through their entire online album and review their profiles...

The grinding never stops. Manufacturing machines are set to work, eco-friendly farms booming, increased use of clean energy. The bridges linger, a symbol of the past physical connections, a little more. The economic connections remained intact, the flow of capital and investment. It's busy, it's bustling, it's exploding, commotion. The Bay culture, that's what they were calling it, like a trendy and modern fashion other economic hubs were trying hard to replicate.

He's lost, but not really; no one's ever lost nowadays. If you don't know where you are, the whole world seems so much larger, he remembers. A wise quote, but no longer applicable, since location tracking became widespread. He'd probably take the high-speed rail down the bay. There's the higher-end option too, the car tube. Ever since the new transportation plan was implemented, well...

He blinks.

And witnesses today's architecture along the skyline change, a new skyscraper morphing into the shape of a spiral lantern. The new material was capable of such elegant and swift shifts, transforming the city horizon each and every day. In the breaking sunset, the silhouette protrudes from the masses rushing below, a mere glimpse of the potential technology to come.

And in the corner of his iris he spots a humble food gathering center, its old-fashioned luminescent billboard shining in the gathering dark of the night. The crowd is gathering too, eager tourists and oldies alike seeking the taste of authentic food – after all, everyone ate vitamin supplements and the newbies preferred the taste stimulator. Siu mai from Hong Kong, a bowl of steaming wonton noodles, crispy buttery egg rolls and creamy chilled egg tarts, the tantalising scent of delicacies tempting with an unknown sense of comfort.

The smell triggers his senses, a shared memory recalled from the back of his mind. He isn't hungry – he never is. But it smells of warmth. Of raw hunger. Inside the center, he watches the civilized wolf down their treats, unsatisfied appetites and unfinished conversations unfolding all in a moment.

A light spring rain drizzles over the city. Chitter, chatter; Pitter, patter.

From beyond the window, he hears the hub bustling at night, firecrackers bursting. Inhaling, he smells warmth. No one sleeps. The Bay comes alive, like a dragon from the depths of its slumber, the proud celebration song pronounced in Cantonesia, and the growing cacophony of rapid exchanges of dialect as the people unite over food.

It's raining, pouring outside now.

Someone catches sight of him, and for once, takes a familiar and long glance. For some reason, he hears distant shouts. He can't stay here - he doesn't belong. So he proceeds, running naked out into the rain with no end goal in mind.

Model MMXX closes his eyes, feeling the battery life drain from him, feeling the water wash over him, feeling alive with a crowd of curious eyes and eager arms faraway, knowing tomorrow his positronic brain would be reset. But for once, he tries to imagine.

Dreamer.

He imagines a city where he belongs, a place where he lives. He sees it clear in his mind, the dawn of the Greater Bay, with its dreamy skies and busy people; its bustling streets and traditional delights and advanced technology and... He's been sleeping his whole life, never dreaming till now. It's a dream of humanity, he thinks to himself. Oh, how beautiful it is to dream!

He awakens.

Future Adventures of The Greater Bay Area

St Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School, Del Mundo, Giuliana Sero – 12

The day couldn't have been any more perfect as they found themselves in their favourite place. The sun was shining above them, with its rays hitting the trees which cast shadows below. Mr. and Mrs. Zhong were sitting peacefully on an old bench in the park holding hands. Mrs. Zhong could feel the firm grip of her husband's calloused hand. She closed her eyes, resting her head on his shoulder. She could feel the soft breeze touching her skin. In the distance, she could hear people chatting, dogs barking, and ducks quacking. She heard her three children the loudest, Gong, Mau, and Hong, giggling and running around.

"You can't catch me!" yelled Gong.

"Come back here!" replied Mau. "You're it!"

"No!" Gong shrieked.

After a long time, the three children stopped playing catch and went back to their parents.

"Ma, when we grow up, what will we be?" asked Hong, grabbing his mom's hand.

Mother Zhong cackled. "You will be the greatest leaders that the land has ever seen."

"Really? I'll be the best leader! Better than *Ge Ge* and *Jie Jie*!"

"Hey!" shouted Gong and Mau in unison.

"Heehee! I'll be richer than you!" Gong exclaimed.

"I'll be more popular!" Mau said, waving her arms in the air, trying to stress and intensify her point.

The three siblings fooled around on their way home; Mother and Father Zhong laughed at their childishness and innocence.

Those were all the nice times that occurred in the past, as the three children had few responsibilities. They were at the phase of exploring the deep wonders of the world, finding their interests, and making friends. Nothing and no one kept them from being mighty adventurers in their own little world; they were best friends who all stuck together.

Unfortunately, childhood ends.

As the siblings got older, little by little, the trio started growing apart due to the responsibilities their parents had given them. It was like a barrier that separated them.

"Why can't you be more like your father!"

"Did you hear? Hong did this..."

"Wow, really? How disobedient he is, that boy."

"You remember Mau? She's basically the opposite of her brother, Gong."

"Oh, she has another brother?"

Hong and Mau's behaviour spiralled downwards and they gained a reputation as troublemakers.

"I'm so tired of this," groaned Hong.

"Me... me too," said Mau.

"I want to leave this place. I want to have my own life."

"Should we leave?"

"I... don't know. The only option now is..."

Knock knock...

“Hi, are you there? I just wanted to ask... if we could, uh, go to the park later...?”

No response.

“Hello, Hong?”

Gong opened the door and it let out a faint creak.

“Hong? Maaaauuu? Where are you? This isn’t funny. Where are-”

Gong noticed the window was open and immediately rushed towards the window.

“HONG?! MAU?! MA MA! BA BA! HONG AND MAU AREN’T HERE! Why...

why did they leave me here?” Gong wailed miserably, shaking his head. Mr. Zhong appeared behind him and placed his weathered hand on his son’s shoulder.

“Go back to sleep, Gong. We’ll take care of this in the morning.” Mr. Zhong replied firmly.

Hong and Mau disappeared into the night. The last anyone heard of them was the small creak that came from opening the window before they fled into the darkness. They ran away from everyone: their neighbours, their friends, their parents, and most importantly, their brother. Gong became miserable after the incident and refused to talk to anyone other than his clients, family, or coworkers.

When Hong and Mau were proper adults with jobs, they decided to go their separate ways since they both had very different interests. However, they promised to keep in touch.

As Hong ran away and gained independence, he became good with self-management and saving money, so he grew up to be a rather wealthy man. He was talented in finance, which helped him amass his wealth. Other than finance, he was also interested in gardening. He had a large garden and he was fond of growing bauhinia trees.

“I’m so proud of my garden. I hope everyone will see it soon! *Jie Jie* and *Ge Ge*- Oh... *Ge Ge...*”

Mau developed an interest in tourism. She owned a popular travel blog, which made her famous because everyone would read her blog to see where to visit. Her blog in particular stood out the most because she was consistent with her updates and each post was as good as the rest. Mau lived in Edo, which was the former name of Tokyo.

“This place is really beautiful. I can’t wait to invite *Di Di* and-! *Ge Ge...* Right, he’s not with us...”

Since Hong and Mau’s disappearance, Father Zhong became very controlling over Gong.

“Please finish this paperwork. It is due soon, sir.”

“Can you take over for me in a meeting next week? I need to have a discussion with Mr. Tamako.”

As his father’s assistant, Gong was given many responsibilities, restrictions, and tasks, but as he had his parents, he managed to keep up with all of the work. He had 9 children when he became an adult. His children inherited their family’s land once they reached a certain age.

As all three siblings grew up to own land, they all managed to become successful people. They all had different interests, but still found success due to their hard work and perseverance. All three of them were known to be economic powerhouses in their respective fields.

Hong, however, became the richest child among them because of his field of interest and dedication.

They were finally happy due to their success.

“Time to write in my blog again!”

“Woo! My stocks have grown!”

“Finally, a break!”

They got what they wanted.

“A donation for my blog? Oh, this is a wonderful day!”

“My clients are all satisfied! What a week!”

“I’m finally getting a lot of clients!”

Hong sat on the roof of his house. “Look at how much I’ve grown... If I didn’t run away, who knows what could’ve happened to me...”

Ring, Ring!

“A phone call? From... Jie Jie? Hello, what do you need me for? I need to hurry and go back to- Why?! ...What did you say? ...Okay, I’ll leave soon. See you there.”

Hong flew back and met Mau, and the both of them headed to the hospital.

Gong saw them and they shared a bittersweet moment as they hugged each other.

“Di Di, Mei Mei, you’ve come back!” he cried.

“I’m sorry,” Hong replied, still clutching onto his siblings.

“Hi, children,” Mrs. Zhong said weakly.

“What happened to you, Ma?” Mau tenderly asked the fragile old lady.

“She got a bit sick. It’s not really serious, though,” explained Gong. “It’ll take a while for her to recover according to the doctors. Ma, we will take some time outside. Is that okay?”

Mrs. Zhong nodded her head and the three adults headed outside. They used some time to make small talk. Mau and Hong found out that Gong had passed down his intelligence to his nine children. The three siblings were catching up with all the years that they had missed out on, discovering details about each other that they would never have guessed.

After a few days, it was time for Hong and Mau to go back to their respective homes, but they didn’t want to leave Gong.

Fortunately, the three shared their contact information so that they could still communicate with one another.

Most importantly, they could still be together, even though they were in different places. Given the respective success each sibling had found, they decided to work together to further develop their land and their industries: each of the kin brought a different set of skills to help each other. The two brothers focussed on generating trade and developing the economy of each area while Mau fervently promoted tourism and shared the success of the three regions through her blog. The passion and skills that the siblings had made them an unstoppable trio.

Since then, they had great lives. Mau, Hong, and Gong worked on expanding the economic potential of their land. They divided their land into what is now known as Macau, Hong Kong, and Guangdong.

The legend of the three siblings became well known around the world. They decided to call the whole region the Greater Bay Area where much trade took place and eventually, it blossomed as one of the world’s most powerful economies.

The Zhong family went back to the nostalgic park. Nothing had really changed, surprisingly.

“How refreshing it is to be back here, eh, *Ge Ge*?” said Mau.

“Yeah,” Gong replied.

“I sure wish we were still small,” said Hong.

“When you were still smaller than me? Sure!” Mau joked.

“Hey!”

The day really couldn’t have been any more perfect to be in their favourite place once again.

A Whole New World

St. Paul's Convent School, Cheung, Jessie – 13

A brand new ‘sort-of’ country anywhere in the world would be shining, shimmering and splendid and a new fantastic point of view. But for our home to be apart of this said ‘sort-of’ country, it would become a dazzling place we never knew and full of indescribable feelings.

And in the midst of it all, food writer Serena Kiang was on a thrilling chase in pursue of delicacies in this brand new ‘sort-of’ country — the Greater Bay Area.

So here she stood, in a two-hour long for a taste of one of Macau’s top places for its signature Portuguese egg tarts. She had only two more people in front of her and it would be her turn — and she would finally taste, for the first time ever, one of the most iconic foods of the historic place. She had her mind set on one thing and one thing only — the classic Portuguese tart, no fancy flavours and no custom additions.

She had her mind set. That is, until she heard the young couple just two spots before her in line receive egg tarts that looked slightly different than the classical one she would be trying. Watching the content sighs and satisfied grins on said customers, Serena was just ever-so-slightly convinced to try it out.

“Excuse me,” Serena asked the couple, “What is that? It looks different.”

With a mouth full of their special egg tart, the young man looked over to Serena. “Fresh cream for filling, instead of the usual flour and water.”

“Is it any good?”

The young girl nodded so enthusiastically that Serena thought the girl’s head was about to fall off. “So good. Way better than the classic, not that it’s any bad.”

Serena thanked the couple and watched as they head to their next destination for photos. Some would say that she was shameless, but that was just the kind of woman Serena Kiang was — she didn’t care for social expectations or etiquette, for filling her stomach with good food was the most important thing for her.

So Serena set her mind on something else: one of each.

The couple was right. The cream-filled tart was better than the classic, but the classic was not bad either. In her notebook, she scribbled down just how delectable the local treats were for later organisation.

Her next destination in her search for Greater Bay delicacies would be Hong Kong — where she looked forward most to curry fishballs and egg puffs, shark fin soup and Kong-style milk tea.

Her journey throughout Hong Kong was entertaining, to say the least. She, like she did in Macau with the tarts, took other’s orders into consideration before only adding more to her order. When she tried the curry fishballs, she couldn’t help but order a bowl of a variety of beef parts with turnip; when she tried the egg puffs, she couldn’t resist not ordering a rare and exotic flavour; when she had shark fin soup, she couldn’t not have the chef’s recommendation of stinky tofu; and when she had her milk tea, there was no way she could call her trip complete without a Kong-styled club sandwich.

She ended up spending more than her planned budget for Hong Kong dining, but she had no regrets.

Her expeditions in Guangzhou was even better. She, for the first time in her life, had the famed Long Hu Dou — a famous Cantonese dish made of snake and wild cat. Never in her life had she ever thought of eating snake or wild cat, nor has she ever seen her fellow food writers write on the topic. Turns out, Guangzhou restaurants are known to make the best Long Hu Dou on the planet.

She also gave Shuang Pi Nai a try, and it was love at first taste. She loved the creamy custard so much that she had five bowls at different food streets and restaurants. Much to her surprise, not all stores pair the custard with the same garnish. Some stores top the custard with lotus seeds, some with raisins and some even with jequirity.

She even had Kao Ru Zhu — an entire roast suckling pig. She absolutely adored the way the crisp skin melted in her mouth at contact, how the pork meat was fragrant with oil but not at all greasy, how she couldn't stop eating the pork. She heard from a neighbouring table that Kao Ru Zhu was an important part of Cantonese cuisine and culture, given how it is often used as a prized offering to the dead in traditional families.

As a food writer who has tasted countless delicacies in countless countries, the Greater Bay Area is a dream come true for her. There are a hundred thousand things to see and it was a whole new world much different from Macau, Hong Kong and Guangzhou as individual regions. Divided, they are good; together, they are exquisite.

Fiction

Group 4



We all Need to Grow

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Apelbaum, Mia – 15

“Make more money, work harder, you’re late”, it’s 8:00 am and those are the only words I’ve heard today. I don’t even get a simple hello, but I guess that’s how it works. No one cares, not about me, not about the people around them, they only care about one thing, money. People say the Greater Bay Area is the best thing that could happen to us. Now, we are one of the strongest economic areas in the whole world, but it feels more like a soulless factory. No one knows anything about me, they don’t know my name, they don’t know what I enjoy, all they know is money. My life was not meant to be like this; my life was meant to have purpose.

It’s 12:02 pm and no one has said anything to me, not even a hello. The only person that spoke to me was the new intern asking about the cafeteria. But it’s alright. I have a reason for this soulless life I live; they say it’s what’s best for our country, this is the life I chose for myself. I keep working, throwing everything I have at my computer, watching the little lines moving up and down. My eyes slowly burn as I reach my tenth hour of work. I was meant to finish work at 5:00 pm, but the markets began moving again, and my boss’s words were constantly ringing in my ears, “make more money, work harder.” It was like an anthem that played on repeat in my mind. I wanted to leave. I had a better life planned for myself but instead, I became a machine, a money machine. Once I lost her, I had nothing but my job, it was my escape, but now it feels like the opposite. It’s 9:00 pm and I have finally finished work. I leave my office, no one says goodbye. All I hear is Xing, the intern, badgering me with more useless questions. But I have learned, I have learned how to only focus on my work so I drown out the useless noise coming out of his mouth and I continue on my journey home.

I take the metro for exactly 46 minutes on the green line. By 10:00 pm, I arrive at my station. I walk out the station buy a snack and head on my journey home. By 10:08 pm, I am walking the 12 minute journey home. It’s dark. The wind whistles in the distance and a shiver is sent through my spine. It’s been colder lately; still humid but cooler. I walk staring at the ground. I’d know this route with my eyes closed, it’s the same route I have walked for the last three years. I continue walking along the narrow road. I am almost home when, suddenly, I feel a gentle tap on my shoulder. The tap sends tiny little pulsating movements through my body; I jump back in fear. This is a quiet neighborhood, so this tap startles me, I’ve never seen anyone out at this time of night. I fling my body in a fight or flight response and before I can see the person who tapped me, they disappear as if made of nothing, as if the air had tapped me. All I see is a single pink chrysanthemum lying on the floor. They used to be her favorite flower but that was a long time ago. This startles me; a pink chrysanthemum is one of the rarest flowers in this area. I tell myself that it’s been a long day, and I am tired. I just need to get home and sleep. I get home, it’s 10:20 pm and I fall asleep by 11:02 pm.

Today is a Tuesday, I get to work at 8:05 am still not good enough for my boss. As usual I get the exact same words thrown at me. “Make more money, work harder, you’re late again”. The day continues to drag with each hour passing my eyes getting ever so weary and my body slowly giving in to the exhaustion. At 1:04 pm I get my lunch, a cold turkey and cheese sandwich. I continue to work pouring all I have into my computer. It’s 9:00 pm and

I have finally finished my work. I head home the exact same route as it's always been and as it always will be. I take the metro for exactly 46 minutes on the green line, by 10:00 pm I arrive at my station. By 10:08 pm I am walking the 12 minute journey home.

She would have hated me for this, she lived each day spontaneously, my life was anything but spontaneous. I have blocked that chapter of my life out but every so often at a late hour when I am walking home all alone, and all the trees and roads are silent, I can't help but think what my life would have been like if she was still here. The roads are empty and dark, a car passes on average once every four minutes. Each person in each of those cars has lived a life, each of those people has experienced grief or love, they have experienced emotion just as any other human being. Yet each second in the last thousands of years had to align perfectly in order for them to be in that car at that exact time, all the grief and love they have felt has got them to this exact moment driving on this street. So when I had been walking for eight minutes and the second car that drove by me stopped right next to me, I knew that every event in their lives and mine had aligned perfectly for us to bump into one another, because these things are more than an accident.

When the dark grey Kia stopped right next to me I thought it quite strange. I paused and wondered what led this car to stop. This was unusual. I had walked this path for three years and not once did a car ever stop. I was just about to keep walking home when a lady jumped out of the car. She came and stood in front of me and whispered, "it's gonna be alright", and as quickly as she spoke to me, she drove away. I stood there for the next two minutes in shock. She had wavy long brown hair and eyes that looked like warm pools of honey. That face seemed so familiar - almost too familiar. It looked so much like her, but that was my past and whatever this encounter was, it meant nothing. I continued to walk home. I felt uncomfortable and exposed, this was the second day in a row something happened that was not in my routine. I had buried everything from my life four years ago but it was almost as if all of it was coming back.

Today is Friday, it's my birthday. We used to have a tradition each year on my birthday. We would make a cake on the morning of my birthday and then eat it together. It was the most simple of rituals but meant so much to me. Now it was four years later and no cake waited for me, the only thing that awaited me in my day was work and the prospect of making money. I went to work, it was the same as every other day. No one spoke to me. I just stared at my computer all day, letting all the little numbers take me on a journey. Today, just as every day, I worked late. I finished work at 9:00 pm, I took the metro for exactly 46 minutes on the green line, by 10:00 pm I arrived at my station. By 10:08 pm I was walking the 12 minute journey home.

As I walked home on this 12 minute journey, a part of me ached. I tried so hard to bury her, bury the memories of her but seeing the face of that woman brought back all the pain. It all happened four years ago, she was the light of my life, she was the splash of color on my plain canvas. We had moved into a new apartment and I'd wanted to settle down, and get a stable job, but she wanted to travel and see the world. What started off as small arguments led to screaming matches. Even though we could never agree, we loved each other too much to stay mad. One night we fought and what started off like any other night turned out to be the fight that would forever change my life. We fought as usual but unlike all the other nights of fighting she was really done this time, she said she needed some air, she walked out the front door and never came back. I let her go. I looked for her everywhere, but I never found her. I felt lost and without a purpose so I dedicated my whole life to my work. After all, that's what drove her away and led her on that fateful walk.

Today is Monday, I came to work at the same time as every other day. No one says hello, no one asks how I am but this is my life and I am here to make money for the Greater Bay Area. I sit down at my computer and begin staring at the pulsating numbers. My thoughts feel like they are burning a hole in my brain, I can't stop thinking about that woman I saw. I see her in my dreams, it feels like more than just a coincidence. It's as if my brain is trying to tell me something. Before I knew it, I was wrapped up by all these thoughts and suddenly the office began to feel cramped and claustrophobic, I needed to go on a walk, I needed the fresh air. As I headed downstairs I stared at my phone trying to escape all the pain, when suddenly I bumped into a woman. This woman was identical to the one I saw the other day. She muttered six words, "I am sorry I hurt you," and just like that she was gone.

My world began to spin, suddenly everything I knew felt wrong. All of this felt like more than just a coincidence, I needed to find this woman. She just looked too much like her. All the pain I tried to push down all the memories I pushed away came back. It felt as if I was being stabbed by thousands of needles all over my body and before I knew it, I was crying. I hadn't cried since she disappeared, it felt like everything I had suppressed for the last four years poured out of me, I cried and cried until I was dry. I cried for what my life could have been, but mostly I cried for her. This time I left work early. I went home and promised myself if I ever saw this woman again I would follow her because right now, she felt like my only hope. I took the metro for exactly 46 minutes on the green line, by 1:00 pm I arrived at my station. By 1:08 pm I was walking the 12 minute journey home. As I walked this 12 minute journey home I saw the woman sitting on a bench as if waiting for someone. I walk up to her, my heart beating a million beats per minute This might be my chance to truly find out what happened to her. All my questions might finally be answered. I walked up to this woman and before I could reach the bench I realised that I was all alone.

Today is Tuesday, I get to work at 8:00 am. I sit down and stare at my screen for the next three hours pouring all of my pain towards making money. This is the Greater Bay Area, one of the strongest economic areas after all. It's 1:30 pm I just finished eating a stale tuna sandwich when the same lady reappears and walks into my office. Once I saw her it was like nothing else mattered I needed to know the truth, I ran up to her and all she said was that I needed a fresh start. I wanted to ask her more questions and just before I could speak to her my co-worker came up to me and asked me a question, and suddenly when I turned around the lady was gone as if she was never there in the first place. I walk back to my desk and just stare at my computer for the next few hours. I felt numb, nothing made sense to me.

Its 9:00 pm, I take the metro for exactly 46 minutes on the green line, by 10:00 pm I arrive at my station. By 10:14 pm I am walking the 12 minute journey home. I walk home as quickly as possible, nothing is making sense. I feel crazy, all I want is answers, I knew I had to leave, all the work and the money was never going to be the answer to my pain.

Anger works in mysterious ways, it comes from deep within us and attacks when we least expect it. On this Tuesday I came home and before I knew it, I became a different person. I was mad. I was mad at my past, at my wife and at what my life had become. Screams crawled out of my chest and echoed through my house. I smashed everything; all my wife's old vases, all the pictures hanging on the wall. She isn't alive anymore I have to let go and stop hanging on to the past. I turn around and standing there is the same lady that has been appearing all week, all she says is "congratulations, you can finally move on."

That night I left. I left my home, I left my job and I left the Greater Bay Area, I left the place that was home. Deep down I knew the moment that she walked out on our argument and never came back, that was when the Greater Bay Area stopped feeling like home. After that night I never came back I left every morsel of my past there.

It's been three years since I left the Greater Bay Area. I finally feel some peace. It's been seven years since my wife, Jade, disappeared. People say that time heals all wounds, but this was one wound that needed more than time to heal. Each individual human experiences growth in their own way, some people grow mentally and some grow physically. I needed to lose everything that was comfortable to finally be able to grow and to heal my wounds.

Zhong's Last Mission

Carmel School – Elsa High School, McGaughy, Kai – 15

The Greater Bay Area. A place where steel behemoths clattered down tracks long into the night, where concrete giants reached up to touch the sky, where hordes of people pushed and shoved their way across cities. It was a place where the needs of the many were ignored for the wants of the few. But that was about to change. Months of civil unrest had rocked the region, and in some cities, it had turned into a revolution.

Zhong was not on the side of the revolutionaries. After all, he was a hired gun, most would say the best in the region. Often, his employers were the shadowy authoritarian figures that ran the Greater Bay Area, and this was no exception. The Chancellor knew that taking out the leader would result in a collapse of the movement. In order to ensure their plan succeeded, they assigned Zhong to the mission. Luckily for these authoritarians that ran the Greater Bay Area, Zhong had just found the headquarters for this civil unrest campaign. This is why he was perched on a roof, with a precision rifle in front of him, a finger on the trigger. He was waiting for the leader to step into Zhong's view, to take his last step.

Then Zhong saw it. The edge of a body in sight. His finger pressed the trigger and, strangely, he didn't hear a shot. He tried to tighten his grip but he couldn't. His moral compass, for the first time in decades, pointed towards true North. Zhong attempted to force himself to finish the job, thinking about the major reward he would be given. It was useless. Deep down, he knew that what this movement was fighting for was right, and emotionally, he couldn't bear to be the one responsible for ending it.

He took his rifle and slung it over his back. He walked up to where the leaders of the movement were staked out, and full of unease, and knocked on it's door. Someone responded with a, "Who's there." Zhong told him, "It's Zhong. I'm someone that can help you" The door swung open, and Zhong was immediately confronted with a pistol in his face. The man holding said pistol said in an inquisitorial voice, "Why do you have a rifle?" Zhong thought fast, and came back with, "I was hired to take out your leader, but I've had a change of heart." He was relieved of his rifle, and escorted up a set of stairs to a small room.

He was met by a fairly average looking man. The man said, "My name is Chen. As you can probably guess, I am the leader of this movement. By the fact that my assistant is holding a rifle, I take it you were here to kill me." Zhong informed him, "I was, but I couldn't go through with it. It didn't feel right." Chen pried, "Why do you think that is? Do you feel that what I am leading is the right way forward?" Zhong took some time to think about it, even though he knew the answer. "Yes", Zhong finally answered, "I do." Chen smiled, "Good. I was hoping so." He continued, "You know, if you really think that what we are fighting for is right, we could offer you employment. Unfortunately though, you would not be able to receive the payoff for some time." Zhong told him, "I'd have to think about that. I'll let you know when I've decided." He then took Chen's encrypted contact details and left.

Late into the night, Zhong was still awake, thinking about what he had done. By now, his employers would certainly know that he had not completed the mission. He didn't know how severe the consequences would be, although he had heard stories. He looked out of his window to check if any security force were there, just in case. To his horror, he saw a group of black vans just outside the building's entrance, with dark shapes emerging

from the vehicles. He knew that they would be outside his door in a matter of minutes, so in a scramble, he gathered the essentials he would need to survive. These included his rifle, food and water, clothing to change into, and a large backpack to store this in. With this, he ran out of the back entrance of his apartment to the fire escape. As he reached the bottom of the fire escape, he realised he had made too much noise and attracted the attention of the security forces standing by the entrance. At the sight of Zhong, they opened fire. His instincts kicked in, and Zhong found himself sprinting through dark alleyways and behind decrepit buildings. Luckily, Zhong was able to outrun the security forces, due to their heavy equipment and armor. After catching his breath, Zhong thought to himself, “Why was I being shot at? I haven’t done anything to those men!” For Zhong, this all came as a new realisation. He knew that the government was sometimes extreme in their law enforcement, but had never experienced it first-hand, at least not until now. This was the tipping point for him. He contacted Chen and informed him of the situation, and not even minutes later, Zhong was in a civilian car driving towards the movement’s headquarters.

Back at the movement’s headquarters, Zhong again walked up the set of stairs and swung open the door. He told Chen, “I accept your job offer.” Chen seemed delighted, “Good. Let’s get to briefing then.” Zhong was told that his job was to assassinate the all-powerful shadowy figure that ruled the Greater Bay Area, the Chancellor. After the briefing, Zhong exclaimed, “That’s it? Nothing about where to find him or how the job should be done?” Chen replied calmly, “No, I’m sorry. Our intelligence is very limited. However, I’d expect that you know enough about him to get the job done.”

Zhong decided that there was no use in staying around at the headquarters, as that only increased the chances of being discovered. He changed his clothing, put on a hooded jacket, and walked towards the train station. He headed towards the area around the region’s governing offices, as he figured it would be the last place that security forces would come looking for him. He knew that the Chancellor never came out of the building for anything, so Zhong would have to find a way in. His plan was to walk back into the governing offices building, and to pretend that he had to give a mission report to the Chancellor. Then once inside, he would request a private meeting with the Chancellor, and finally, he would kill him with whatever tools he could find inside, or just with his bare hands.

As he walked up to the office’s security checkpoint, the guard said, “Ah yes, Zhong, the Chancellor has been expecting you.” At first he felt relieved, that this would be easier than expected. But then he felt a sense of unease at the fact that the Chancellor had anticipated his presence. After all, who else would have sent security forces after him?

As he stepped foot in the Chancellor’s office, he was shocked to see that there was no security presence. The Chancellor spoke first, “I heard that you did the job well. Now as you know, payment is in order. Why don’t we get that sorted?” Zhong was paranoid. He knew that the Chancellor was lying. His instincts told him that there was a good chance he would not leave this room alive, and he now regretted his decision to go with a rushed plan. He looked over at the Chancellor, and saw him on his cell phone. Sensing Zhong staring at him, the Chancellor tried to relax Zhong, “I’m just telling my personnel to bring in your payment.” For a few seconds more they sat there in silence, until Zhong felt something, or someone, was behind him. He turned around, and saw four special forces personnel, all with guns pointed at him.

Seeing that, Zhong realised the predicament he was in. The Chancellor smiled, and proceeded to inform Zhong of what had happened, “You see, we knew that you had not completed the mission. We wanted to make sure you had completed the mission, and so

agents were assigned to follow you. It was only seconds after you entered the enemy's headquarters that we found out about your defection. We didn't know why you chose to do what you did, but we decided that it was best to terminate you, for better or worse. Although, as you know, the men sent to your house were unsuccessful, they spotted you just as you got in that civilian transport, which we knew was bound for the headquarters of our enemy. Obviously, that would mean that you would come back. To kill me. So, I prepared for that, only I wasn't expecting for it to be so soon. Alas, here we are. So take your final breaths Zhong, and watch as I continue to take many more."

During the Chancellor's speech, Zhong had been itching his hand closer and closer to his bag. He felt the coarse fabric of his rucksack, and quickly grabbed his rifle out of it. A special forces personnel immediately saw this, and kicked the rifle out of Zhong's hand. What he hadn't anticipated, was that Zhong had wanted them to do that. He grabbed the man's leg, and twisted it. There was a sharp crack, followed by a loud scream. Seeing this, the other special forces fired at Zhong, but he was too quick, and he grabbed their fallen comrade and used his body to block their shots. Simultaneously, Zhong charged at them, and as they were all lined up, the first one he ran into fell down, followed by the second and the third. They all scrambled to get back up, however their heavy armor made this task cumbersome. Seeing their vulnerability, Zhong grabbed his own rifle, and not wanting to take any risks, shot them all. He then looked back to where the Chancellor was standing, but all he saw was an open door in his place.

Zhong ran through the open door, and it led him to the building's storage room, which was empty due to the lack of supplies that the revolution had caused. Then, the blaring noise of the evacuation alarm followed by flashing red lights took over the building. Not allowing himself to be bested by anyone, he wandered through the large room cautiously, stubbornly trying to find the Chancellor and complete his mission. As he turned a corner, he saw a movement, a sharp flash of light, and his chest filled with pain. He put his hand to his chest, and he felt warm, sticky blood. He heard slow, rhythmic footsteps approach him. A deep voice he instantly recognised boomed, "Did you really think I'd be that easy to kill? I know your skills Zhong, but I also know your arrogance, your ego, that won't let you stop until you reach your goal. Now say goodbye Zhong, and accept that you failed your mission." His vision starting fading to black. Besides the Chancellor's footsteps, he heard another noise. A chant, growing louder by the second. Then a loud crashing noise, followed by sunlight beaming into the room. Zhong put two and two together, and realised that with the building evacuated, the revolutionaries had taken their opportunity and broken into the building. Using what remaining strength he had, he sat upright, and watched as a horde of charged into the building. The Chancellor tried to flee, and found himself surrounded on all sides. Zhong smiled, and knew that although he had not completed his immediate mission, what he had done would be extremely valuable to the movement. He saw Chen running towards him, a pair of medics by his side. Chen tried to put Zhong at ease, "You'll be okay Zhong, we'll get you through this" but then a medic whispered in Chen's ear, and his facial expression dropped. Zhong, with a raspy voice, told Chen, "No, I won't. Both of us know it." Chen replied with sadness in his voice, "You're right. All I can tell you is that what you did will not be forgotten, and neither will you." Zhong heard this, smiled, and drew his final breath.

With the governing offices ransacked, and the Chancellor captured, the rest of the region's governing body and law enforcement collapsed within weeks. Chen became the new Chancellor of the region, and set up a system of government with its basis of laws

rooted in freedom, peace, and equality. This new independent region prospered, and every child born after the revolution knew naught besides a life of prosperity and happiness. As for Zhong, a statue immortalising him was built adjacent to the new governing offices, to ensure that the citizens of the Greater Bay Area did not forget the ultimate sacrifice that he and many other revolutionaries made for everyone else living in the region.

Call My Name

Heep Yunn School, Tsui, Yu Hei Iris – 15

The first time I heard her name was on the radio, among a cluster of other meaningless names, pronounced in the monotone voice of the unknown speaker. Even then I felt my spirits leap as her name rang in my ears like an ocean wave foaming to shore, like the wind in the starlit trees, and my spirit flickered with unbridled joy.

‘Bringing together the cities of Qianhai, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, the championship is hosted by Greater Bay Area Homeland Youth Community Foundation, targeting those ready to commit themselves to innovation and entrepreneurship,’ continued the speaker. ‘The above names have been taken down for the competition. There are 43 places left for registration.’

“Not a bad opportunity,” said my father, looking up from his newspaper. “Li Wen, want to give it a shot?”

My brother, occupied with his work at Harvard Business School, barely looked up from his laptop. “I’ve got enough work, Father.”

“Ah.” Disappointment was etched across my father’s face, but it could not compare to the misery that rested against my heart, forcing down the golden spark of light that had lit up my soul. Everyone knew Li Wen, son of the renowned Li Qian, businessman and billionaire, lord of the marketing economy. No one knew the younger son who dwelt in the shadow of his brother, nor did anyone ever witness my father’s eyes glint with pride as he looked toward the son he was ashamed of.

The listlessness churning in the cavity of my chest led me to the empty streets as dusk closed down. The street-lamps lit up the darkness with their pulsing golden glow, igniting the lonely space that was the domain of those who were young and haunted by dreams they could never fulfil.

My footsteps paced the streets, the pavement shining silver in the moonlight that battled the reflecting glow of the lamplight. They stopped in front of a bar, where a bartender caught sight of my face and reached immediately for a frosted glass bottle of wine on the counter. I had been there enough times for him to recognise me, and call my unknown, insubstantial name.

“Mr. Li Jian,” he said. “Out for another night-time walk?”

I nodded, accepting the bottle and cigarette he handed me.

I made my way into the pub, lighting the cigarette. The yellow sulphur burned like candlelight. Electric lights flickered and pulsed around me, the purple lights weaving their swirling patterns on the floor. They lingered on the faces of the same phantoms that came to haunt the pub at night, the dreamless ones, the aimless ones, who had somehow lost purpose.

Through my blurry vision, I sought in the misty wreath of the drunken, hazy world another soul that would curb my loneliness. The pub’s lights flickered, turning it into a revolving lantern, and the faces of the lost souls that wandered here were gone, wandered there and were gone again. They whirled and danced, and — with a sudden purposeful move — focused on the face of the girl that stepped through the door.

The bartender cried out her name.

My head jerked up.

Her name resounded sweetly through the musk-smelling, drunken air, a note of clarity amid the chaos that whirled through my chest and roared into my thorax. My lips moved, mouthing that name over and over, while no sound escaped my lips. Her body shone with the aura of self-assuredness and purpose.

She rummaged in her purse, trying to find her wallet, I assumed — her features twisted into helplessness. My heart lurched with pity, and without knowing what I was doing, I was out of my chair and making my way towards her.

“I’ll pay,” I said to the bartender.

“No, sir,” she said, her voice like fingers running upon the silken strings of a harp that was my every gesture and word. “I can go home and retrieve the money.”

I ignored her and pushed the bills across the counter. “No change,” I said.

I felt her eyes linger on me, on the gold watch on my wrist, my crisp white shirt, the jacket thrown over my arm. Her hair was in an ebony braid thrown carelessly over her shoulder, shining in the golden lamplight of the empty streets.

“Thank you, mister,” she said.

“We all need a drink once in a while,” I said languidly, though my heart beat in a frenzy of delight. “Just to indulge a little.”

She laughed. “True, sir.”

“Call me Li Jian.”

The core of my soul trembled; my name escaped from my lips so freely, so carelessly, the name that no one knew or cared for, not even my father. It was the name of a phantom of empty streets.

“Well then, Jian,” she said, and the way she pronounced my name sent a thrill through me — “Thanks for the drink. It took too long planning my entry for —”

“The Qianhai-Guangdong-Hong Kong- Macau Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition, yes?”

She looked surprised.

“I heard your name on the radio,” I said.

“I see.” Her smile was beatific. “Are you a competitor then, Jian?”

“No.”

“why not?”

“I don’t join competitions. My brother is the one who does things like that.”

“And why only your brother?”

“My father believes he has the potential. And I, unlike Li Wen...” I shrug. “I don’t.”

She stepped forward, turning her face to the moonlight, until her face was bathed in quicksilver and the moon was reflected in her eyes like a silver sickle. “I don’t believe you, Jian. You do not cast your hat into a ring because you think you might win. You do it so that you might leave a mark upon the world.”

A shudder ran through me. Who was I? I was Li Jian, insignificant compared to my father’s accomplishments and my brother’s genius. I came into this world quietly, and I would leave it just as soundlessly.

“Why did you join?” I asked.

Her face turned downward, staring at the golden pavement.

I called her name.

“Can I tell you a secret?” she whispered.

She brought me to the outskirts of Guangdong city, away from the hustle and bustle of the golden utopia beside the singing Pearl River Delta. Her hand clung to mine as we stepped off the glistening high-speed train into another world.

A cracked pavement ran under our feet, narrowing as it tunnelled between the outer walls of houses with peeling lacquer, resembling cracked human molars. The sun burned away any lustre the village would have had. Dust covered every inch of the place, sinking into the wrinkled faces of the houses we passed and milling into the blind eyes of the street.

“This is my home,” she said.

I was speechless.

A woman sat on the crumbling doorsteps of a cottage, cradling a delirious child in her arms. Our appearance — clad in fashionable garments, the coins jingling in my pocket — caught her attention, and she fell to her knees, head bowed to the relentless sun. “Help me!” she crowed to my girl. “He’s dying!”

The girl beside me took a breath; a storm raged inside her, a battle between conscience and helplessness. Her hand drifted outwards, but fell back, useless, against her side. She took me by the arm and led me away.

“She needs help,” I protested.

“We cannot help,” she whispered.

The woman’s tears fell upon the cracked earth like rain upon stones. I dawdled a moment longer before turning away.

The sickness and helplessness settled like a plague over the village. Left behind by the world of Greater Bay, a world sunken into poverty while we within the shining cities drowned in wine and begotten happiness. A queasiness settled in my stomach; I looked towards the girl beside me; her face was stoic, though tears spun within her eyes.

“That’s why you joined.”

She answered nothing. Did she have to?

“You want to come up with a cure.”

“I need the money to help my family,” she said, ‘so I thought I would help them by doing something good for everyone. It’s the only thing I can give them — a way out of poverty, a new life...’

Her voice faded away, listless upon the wind.

The train whisked us through a world of glamour and mystery; the daylight shone upon Greater Bay, and Greater Bay basked in that light, unknowing, ignorant of a world that was borne ceaselessly into the past.

“I’ll join. We will both try to come up with a cure,” I said. “That way we both get what we want. You get to help your family and your village. I get my father’s recognition.”

She leaned closer to me, smiling. Her breath was warm against my lips; her fingers rested on the gold watch around my wrist.

“What do you say?” I whispered.

Her arms were around my neck, her solid warmth pressing against mine; I dropped my burnt-out cigarette into the ashtray and embraced her. Her whispered yes in my ear

was a glowing spark; I felt a desire blooming: I did not care for my father's pride, nor my insubstantial name — I cared only that she was the one to call my name.

The revolving lantern hovered above me, releasing a powder of golden light on the snowy parchment that lay on the golden mahogany desk; their folds released the scent of musk and mothballs into the air. My fingertips lingered on the printed characters that spiralled their way across the scrolls, their strokes bare and drifting, but with purpose.

My head fell forward into my hands — what folly have I landed myself into? I should have left the glory to my brother. My mind was incapable of such feats as a perfect cure, despite the countless tutors my father hired to light some intelligence in my witless brain.

I lit another cigarette; I watched the smoke spiral upwards with soulless eyes.

My nights with my girl left us wandering in Hong Kong's empty, darkened streets in the hour of early morning, where we drowned in the indulgence of alcohol and the flickering haze of dreams. She asked me often for what lay in my pockets, to facilitate her research, she said, and I willingly handed over the dollars that would give her the support to find a way to give the villagers a new life.

She came to the pub one night, her cheeks were flushed with ardour and ecstasy. She took her wine, and in the midst of soaked euphoria, she told me her findings — an equation that would lead to the cure she found; but she needed money to procure the ingredients, and forge an all-curing medication.

"I found it all," she said, and cast onto the counter before us a piece of parchment. The characters spun across the manuscript a thread of equilibrium among the treacherous sea of innovation and medical studies. I felt within them the idea of creation — the world moving forward —

"Of course I can give you money," I responded swiftly, my heart hammering away — I felt a sense of resistless dread mingled with breathless eagerness, and guilt weighed on my heart with anticipation of what my mind compelled me to do — a dreaded act — a traitorous deed —

"Thank you," she said languidly as I handed her the fee; amid her drunken haze of liquor, as she wandered helplessly in the domains of smoky dreams, I folded the scroll shut, and tucked it into my pocket.

The headlines blared the golden news — *The champion of this year's Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition — The Son of Famed Businessman comes up with a Cure to Change the World — How proud must Mr. Li Qian be to have a son equally as accomplished as he!*

My normally placid father was moved to jubilation. His eye glinted with surprise and pride as he bent his gaze upon me. My name was inscribed on the gold trophy. I was no longer the insubstantial phantom that my father tried desperately to hide, who lurked in the shadow of his brother's success; my name was known all across Greater Bay Area.

In the months that followed, filled with bliss and merriment, there was only one flaw, but it was a flaw that grew day by day. I wandered the empty streets still, but they offered

no solace — the girl I loved no longer returned to fill the air with the music of her laughter, and my night-time walks were as silent and drifting as before. I lingered in the shadows; my tears blurred the vacuum of memory and nostalgia into a bowl of black night, punctured by pinpricks of light from the streetlamps.

Why was it that my name floated upon the winds of fame, was shouted and called everywhere, and still I lingered, a lost, star-crossed wanderer, haunted by memories, in a tunnel of darkness?

I saw her again a few nights later at waking hour, at the place where we first met. She looked very much like the same girl I met months ago, when the bartender cried her name.

Her shadow fell across the counter. She drained her cup of liquor in one continuous swallow.

“You betrayed me,” she said.

“You betrayed me,” I echoed.

She shot me a look of dislike.

“You took my findings,” she said, “and you used them for yourself. You stole my future from me. I could have done much more for my village. Instead you took my work for fame.”

Her eyes burned with anguish and anger; I had not wanted her beside me to feel her rage, I had wanted to listen to her laugh, feel her warmth against my body, feel the love that drifted here and there among the people of Greater Bay Area, but never lingered, never stayed —

“You took my money,” I answered. “You never wanted my love. You pretended to be in love with me so you could make money off me.”

Silence hung between us. The purple lights flashed on her face, illuminating it for an infinite moment, before plunging it into darkness again.

“I suppose that’s what’s going on everywhere in Greater Bay.” I kept my eyes on her raven braid. “All you care about is yourself. Once you see something that will give you an opportunity, an advantage, you drop everything — even the ones you love — so that you can grasp on to it.”

“And we linger as ghosts,” she said.

We sat in silence again. My eyes fell on the gold watch on her wrist and rested there.

She rose from the table. “Goodbye.”

I called her name.

It resounded endlessly, hopelessly, in the space of the pub. She did not call my name.

Outside, a streetlight guttered out like a dying flame; I could smell the stale cold fragrance of morning. My cigarette flickers and goes out, its smoke drifting into the empty void.

Irresolutely, tears filled my eyes. She was right. We in Greater Bay lingered here, ghosts of forgotten dreams and genuine feelings. We sold each other for wealth and fame. For that we paid the price of unconditional love. What was worse was that we did not regret it. If given the chance, we would betray each other all over again — and again — and again —

She returns after many years to wander the moonlit streets.

Greater Bay Area. She remembers the way the sun always struck the shore first, highlighting the glistening circle of cities that ringed a shining centre they called Beijing.

Thunderclouds disperse on the horizon, its underbelly swollen like a pink udder; daylight shoots through it and the land beneath it glows with an artificial light.

The wind whispers; withered leaves collect at her feet. The streetlamps are dying; she waits for the sunrise.

In her hand she clutches the piece of parchment that arrived at her village a week ago. She unfolds it for the umpteenth time, mouthing the words as she reads.

Ten years ago I loved and lost you under the anticipating breath of the sunrise over Greater Bay Area. I was in love with a girl who loved me. But she forced me to see the lack of profundity in the world I was born into. We passed our days adrift on the river of time, trapped in a dreamy world forged of our dwindling breath and smoky days. Greater Bay was a dream of economic prosperity, where all people of different cultures dwelt in love and equality, and technology served to give us a life of comfort and luxury. You forced me to re-evaluate that golden, perfect utopia.

Greater Bay Area is a shallow world. Those who dwell in it desire only fame and wealth. True love that was born in youth, like ours, could not survive in a world where trust was built on business transactions, and was torn apart by economic propositions. Any love that came to life was snuffed out as easily as the guttering flame of the streetlights at dawn.

I once desired that my father should call my name with pride and jubilation. I dreamt that everyone in Greater Bay would call my name everywhere I went. I did not realise that one voice was more powerful and more precious than any other. I finally recognise that the only person I want to hear call my name is the love I lost the day I waited, endlessly, for the sunrise.

So call my name, love — and I shall hear it as the moonlight wanes and the candlelight dies. I shall wait for your dear, known, well-remembered call as I wait for a new day: eyes and ears expectant, senses awake and trembling, flesh quivering on my bones. Oh, love — call my name!

For Times that have Passed, and For Times yet to Come

Island School, Teahan, Anakin – 14

I sit on the balcony of my longtime home in Macau, looking over this reformed city that has now become a part of “The Greater Bay Area”.

My grandchildren, who are running frantically all around me, finally start settling down, before asking an endless array of questions to their now too-old grandfather.

“We wanna know more things about you, Grandpa!!”

“Yeah, yeah!! Where did you grow up?”

“What was life before all this Grandpa?”

“Ooh, I wanna know!!! Tell me, Grandpa, tell me!!!”

I quietly hush them before ushering them to come to sit beside me.

“Now, now. Listen up you two, if you want to know, try not to interrupt too much alright?”

They both nod eagerly and reply with an identical “Yes Grandpapa.”

“When I was a young adult like your elder cousins, life was very different from what it is now.”

Indeed it was.

Life was changing - and it was changing fast. The Greater Bay Area, as the Chinese government dubs it, was in the process of becoming a blissful and vibrant hub connecting all types of Chinese culture, under one colourful roof. At a young age, I wasn't the most fortunate, and I sought for a job to work in the poor suburbs nearby Macau. There, I found a janitor role, in the nearby vicinity of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan corridor, working as a janitor, in Iao Hon. This area's nearby surroundings were riddled with worn-down, clumped buildings, with shop signs and road signs broken beyond compare. There was graffiti loitered everywhere and trash left on the streets.

But from the worn-down streets that I worked in, I also saw the extravagant and flashy buildings and railways that were being built for the Greater Bay Area.

Those buildings who were just like the stars - something I strived for but was too far out of my reach. Those buildings always signified the absolute peak of civilisation in my eyes, with how the buildings were so pristine and immaculate. Those buildings always gave me hope for the future generations - hoping that they'd be living in a more fortunate place than I am.

I still remember the first day working there - I swept the streets with ever so much enthusiasm. Even though the place was worn-down, there were still many people going about their daily life. Grandmothers walking to their nearby wet markets, Grandfathers listening to their caged birds chirp to their heart's content, the constant arguments and just a bit too-loud conversations that I overheard without meaning to, the fresh aroma of the local bakery's pineapple buns. Even among all the weariness, the sense of community felt intangible.

It was also another very important day in my life, as another event happened on the very same day in the midst of this large lifestyle change.

“What was it Grandpapa?” the eldest curiously asked.

“Yeah, we wanna know!” the youngest gleefully replied.

Slightly irked, I continued, saying, “I said no interruptions you two.”

“What happened that day, was that it was the day I met your grandmother.”

That day, was the day that I was exploring my new surroundings, where I was venturing through the busy Iao Hon market at night, looking through the rows and rows of fresh food on display – but was more distracted by this alluring lady on the balcony of the second floor. Intrigued by her, I walked to the outside railing, standing next to her, gazing over this small community.

“What might someone like you be doing here?” Said the unknown lady at the time.

“Just walking around, exploring this place a little,” I replied back – inching closer to the perch she was standing on. “What about you?”

“Same reason here. I wanted to get away from home.” She muttered, “Then, would you like to have a chat?”

“That’s no problem for me.” I answer back, “Don’t mind me asking but, why is someone like you visiting a place like here? There’re not many good things at a glance for people here.”

“Ah. I was just visiting here. Not sure for how long, but I’m here with my family.

However, I could say the same about you. What are you doing here?” She responded back.

“I didn’t have much choice but to move here for a job – but I’m liking it so far. The community and everything, they’re wonderful, if you’re up for it, I’d love to explore the place with someone around here.” I told her.

“That would be lovely. Would you mind explore now?” she asked me, taking her hand out to shake my hand.

“By the way, I’m Ka Ming.” I replied, taking her hand.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Siu Mei.”

And so started our little adventures together.

Things started off slowly – we only did just start to get to know each other. What started off as simple walks around the Iao Hon Market – talking about everything from small talk to delving into our pasts – our conversations were always fruitful and full of life. The small little lunches we had at the local cafe, where we had small bits of each others food, the fun times we had strolling through the busy night markets, always looking at stuff we wanted, but never buying them. Unknowingly, these days spent together would cultivate a strong connection between us. We started sharing more personal information with each other – but it never felt forced, it always felt natural and right that we both were able to trust each other wholly. We went from strangers to friends, and then friends to something special.

The time we spent together blossomed into something indescribable and unforgettable.

It was in a worn-down park nearby, in the darkness and serenity of the night, where we both lay on the too-dark grass, gazing into the stars – except barely visible due to the light pollution – but nonetheless, did not ruin the moment. It was there where we drifted off to another place in time – it was a moment in time that was shared by no one else but us – and a moment where we first said our “I love yous” and finally admitted what we felt to each other. The feeling that night was so sublime – while our spirits were flying freely in pure joy.

However, what I thought was going to be everlasting, disappeared into thin air.

Out of the blue, Siu Mei left without a trace.

With no explanation and no clue on what happened – I spiralled into a pit of lethargicness and sorrow.

But, I had to go back to cleaning on the streets, except that now, I was less whole than before. Every trip to the market now felt emptier, as if the earth lost its moon. Every time I went to the park, I couldn’t help but wonder – what went wrong?

To help fill the void in my life, I worked tirelessly day after day - not giving up on finding her.

However, I found solace in the community where I worked, during a time where I felt gloomy and dejected.

I still vividly recall chatting with community members - on days where there wasn't much cleaning to do.

"Life's moving too fast for an old man like me, isn't it? You younglings still have a whole life ahead of you, especially the one with all this 'greater bay' whatever going on." The old man by the wet market always told me. He would go rambling on tangents about his past generations social issues and his too-high expectations of this generation - trying his best to not sound too harsh to me about how "I never studied hard enough when I was young" and I was "wasting my time", but ultimately still turning his rambles into condemning lectures.

However, he always rose my spirits up - comforting me with his somewhat too harsh words, but intentions pure and innocent. It brought me back into a place of contentedness.

And as time passed, he warmed up to me - and we talked about anything - ranging from his past glory days, or my upbringing - the bond I had grown with not just him, but the whole community was very heartening, and to me, it had become my second home, where I learnt from their cultures and traditions as if I was one of them.

Watching The Greater Bay Area growth accentuating at such a rapid pace and keep these traditions was to put it simply, amazing. This place had become a place where Cantonese culture has prospered and has blossomed into the most beautiful flower. Once a dying dialect many decades ago, this area has cultivated this articulate and buoyant dialect to never-seen-before levels of widespread and common use. These traditions exclusive to people like the small community of Iao Hon have been able to live on, teaching them to simple "passersby" like me.

Thanks to the interconnected transport hub that was brought forth new transport to connect these neighbouring Chinese cities closer and closer together. All different types of Chinese people mixed and mingled about, learning about each other's standard traditions and local foods - how they differed from their hometown, how life was like over there. People who came from all places to visit or work - whether it be the bridge connecting Hong Kong and Macau, crossing the border from Zhuhai, or a ferry from any place - they all were learning from others, all the while teaching others about what their traditions were back home.

Even in the situation that I was in, I enjoyed and fully embraced the lively community spirit, and how welcoming the community was integrating me and considering me as one of their own.

"Wait, Grandpa, does that mean you never met her again?" asked the younger grandchild.

I chuckled slightly, before saying recounting, "No silly, of course not. She's your grandmother now remember?"

But, even as I found comfort in this small, but lovely community, I needed to know where Siu Mei went. Even if they had given me a sense of belonging, my heart still ached and yearned for her to come back. I searched high and low for any information regarding her whereabouts, before finally being led into the radiant island, Taipa of Macau.

Those buildings that seemed echelons away were just mere blocks away, due to the very fast modernisation of Macau. Here came a plethora of mountainous skyscrapers, protruding the sky. All of a sudden, my surroundings were transformed into a contemporary landscape. My surroundings evolved into more sophisticated and renovated buildings, in contrast to the low-rise buildings in Iao Hon.

The bustling sounds of the people scurrying on the road below, going about their day. Cars constantly honking back and forth at each other, busy market mongers trying their best to sell on the streets. The flashy streetlights and signs shining brightly. This was all such a stark contrast to what I had grown accustomed to.

Yet, the abrupt modernisation was not unwelcome to me either, because I was determined to find Siu Mei somewhere in these dazzling group of buildings and windy rows of roads.

All my searching led me to the somewhat remote side street, away from the bright lights of the city stores and colourful houses exteriors.

And it was right there, where I saw the same figure I saw on that second floor of the market, where I saw Siu Mei for the first time in months.

“Siu Mei!”, I painfully screamed out.

“What are you doing here? You aren’t meant to be here Ka Ming!” she spoke exasperatedly, taking a few steps back nearing the close road.

“I’ve been looking for you for so long - please tell me everything that happened. I need to know, even if you might just leave again. I’m here because I missed you so much all this time that you left.” I shouted at her - just hoping she would explain things once and for all.

“I-I don’t know what to say.” she stuttered back in return.

She composed herself before stammering out loud, “I really did miss you too. It was absolutely terrible being without you. I know this may be hard to believe but, I didn’t have any other choice. I had to leave Iao Hon. My family - they forced me out because they didn’t want me to be with you! I begged and pleaded but, they forced me to distance myself from you. I’m so sorry for leaving you all alone, I’m so, so sorry. Please, I regret what I had to do, my family is what has stopped me from wanting to be with you all this time!”

“It’s okay, none of that matters now Siu Mei, I trust you, and I trust that you didn’t want to leave.” I reassured her, “We don’t have to worry about your family, all that matters is that we have each other and make each other happy right? Siu Mei, I don’t know how to express this but, I love you, Siu Mei, I love you. I want you to run away with me back to where we had all our fun times together - we don’t need to think about what anything else.”

“You don’t need to ask Ka Ming. I made up my choice a long time ago - I no longer want to be confined by my family anymore. I want to be free and I want to be happy for what I want, not my family.” Siu Mei declared, “I love you, Ka Ming, I really do love you. So, let’s run away together and start a new life away from here.”

I look into Siu Mei’s eyes before taking her hand onto the pavement by the road, “Shall we?”

She smiled at me before gripping my hand and saying, “We shall.”

“And that’s the story of how we ended up here you two.” I concluded, taking a good long breath, grabbing a sip of water on the cool balcony.

Just as I was expecting a reply from my grandchildren, I saw that both of them were already sound asleep.

Here, in this large intra-connected megacity, the best parts of mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau are all mixed, and here, is where I hope that children just like my grandchildren can make their fondest memories. Thanks to the strong sense of community that has been fostered by connecting all these places together, I can’t wait for all the wonderful things that will happen to my grandchildren as well. Just by looking at them sleeping, it gives me enough reassurance that the youth will be going into this world into an even better place than before, where they will be growing up in with even more things to experience than I ever did.

As I reminisce about my past times that have long passed, I hope for the joyful times that have yet to come for my grandchildren.

Now, it's time for them to make their own special and intimate memories in this place called, "The Greater Bay Area".

Greater Canton, Year 2080

St. Paul's Convent School, Wan, Jasmine – 15

How did we get here? Xiao Lu looked up the history texts on the formation of the Greater Bay Area.

Today the Greater Bay Area in southern China has exceeded the GDP of Tokyo by 25%. Its population has grown to 100m, and Hong Kong and Macao are fully integrated into China in what is known as the Greater Canton Area. Some 60 years ago, the concept of the Greater Bay area to integrate 9 cities and 2 special administrative regions was enacted and the merger began. Over the next 20 years, the merger took shape, with many challenges and successes.

Xiao Lu loved history, and most of all her ability to envisage in her mind the picture of the Greater Canton Area 60 years ago was helped by technology. At a click of her 3D pen, the 3D image of each city filled her bedroom. Hong Kong was and still is an amazing place. Skyscrapers were tall back then but the newer office and apartment blocks were not as tall. Xiao Lu read in an article that the Government had introduced a new law to limit the height of buildings. It was environmentally driven as the theory was that tall buildings trapped fuel and air conditioner emissions which created pollution that was not good for the health of the population. But this was a blessing as the skies were now clear and open to drone traffic. Xiao Lu made a note to fly there on her drone in a couple of weeks. Her friend He Wei was living there and she wanted to have lunch or dinner with her, and maybe do some shopping afterwards.

She noted that the MTR was more for tourists these days. Going down escalators and lifts to the MTR station concourse and taking a train around the city was more for nostalgic purposes. Who would want to travel on the underground with nothing to look at? Nowadays, Canton Area residents travelled stylishly by drone unless the area was drone free.

The world's largest tech company in Shenzhen made the first commercial people carrying drone 25 years ago. Now everyone uses drones. They're still expensive but getting cheaper. There are fewer electric vehicles on the expressways now. 60 years ago, there used to be heavy vehicle traffic and no drone traffic. Almost all the cars, lorries and buses ran on petrol or diesel, causing heavy pollution. Nowadays in the Canton Area there is much less vehicle traffic. Indeed, some expressways have a reduced number of lanes, freeing up land for people to use.

Buzz-Buzz. A 3D hologram of a girl's head appeared two feet away from Xiao Lu. It was He Wei.

"Hey Xiao Lu, sorry to disturb you. Are you coming down to Hong Kong?"

"Hi, He Wei, no problem. Yes. I do intend to come down in 2 weeks' time. I'm just studying the history of Greater Canton."

"Ugh, that sounds boring. I've never understood your fascination with history."

"It's not boring, He Wei. See?". Xiao Lu made a wavy gesture with her left hand and the 3D hologram of He Wei was allowed to view the other 3D cities that Xiao Lu was perusing. "Hong Kong was beautiful back then. Did you know it used to be known as Pearl of the Orient?"

"Wow. It must have been a special place. All the cities look alike nowadays."

It was true. There was no difference between Guangzhou, Zhaoqing, Zhuhai and

Zhongsan compared with Hong Kong. All had tall office buildings and nice apartments. All had drones flying around them.

The only difference was the natural terrain and the culture. Each city had its unique culture. When the Cultural Department decided early on in the formation of the Greater Bay Area that the culture of the cities and special administrative regions had to be maintained, it was a significant move. The Cantonese dialect, being the dominant dialect in the Greater Canton Area was and still is the main dialect. Even more so than 50 years ago, it was encouraged to be used and even the migrants from outside Greater Canton have to use it to get by in daily life.

Shenzhen is the main city. It is futuristic and modern, and home to the tech entrepreneurs. It surpassed Silicon Valley decades ago in terms of size, innovation, investment and bright minds. There are tech entrepreneurs in Shenzhen from all over the world. This is the place to be. Flashy drones, nice houses with wonderful fresh air. Schools and medical facilities are the best in the whole of the Greater Canton area.

“I’ve got to go now. I’m preparing to go to my Uncle Shek’s tonight,” said Xiao Lu.

“Alright. See you in two weeks’ time!”

Xiao Lu used her left-hand gesture again and out popped the main menu in front of her. “Drone instructions: Uncle Shek, Foshan.” A robotic voice blared out. “The address has been programmed in. Departure in 1 hours’ time”. Good. That was enough time to get ready and dressed.

-1 hour later-

Xiao Lu’s drone appeared parked by her 15th floor window bay. Xiao Lu emerged from the balcony door and stepped into her drone. The drone sped away as Xiao Lu waved another shape to lock the balcony door. She was thinking back to her review today of old houses and apartments and residents fumbling for their keys. She didn’t quite understand why metal keys were a necessity in those days. If you lost your key you needed to locate a locksmith. Well, there aren’t many houses that use keys nor are there any locksmiths these days. Today’s apartments are impervious to burglars, unless they kidnap you and force you to wave your secret wave codes.

“Time to Foshan 12 minutes.” In the old days by road it would have taken hours. Now drone travel saves a lot of time for a lot of people.

Xiao Lu continued her review of the old cities in the drone and requested the 3D images of historical Foshan. An old city, it still had its culture of Cantonese opera and Southern Martial Arts. Famous Martial artists originated from Foshan. Cantonese opera had seen a revival in the past 30 years. Xiao Lu thought that these cultural aspects had been kept alive by those that had the vision to keep handing down these skills and knowledge to the next generation. With technology advancements, this should even be easier but you never knew what the masters took to their graves.

Xiao Lu’s drone stopped outside Uncle Shek’s house. Her Uncle Shek used to live in the old house with a bit of farmland, and later it had been converted into a modern house with a garden.

“Leave the drone in the garden!” greeted Uncle Shek. They embraced.

“You are getting more beautiful every time I see you, my favourite niece,” he teased her. “Come. Let’s go to the ancestral temple and pray to your ancestors before we eat.”

Uncle Shek was a traditionalist. Even in the modern times. Joss sticks still were the norm

here at our ancestral temple, about 50 yards from Shek's house. His children (Xiao Lu's cousins) were studying in Europe. "When do Ah Bo and Ah Loong come back?"

"Oh, not for another month. They need to finish their term exams first." replied Uncle Shek as we walked into the ancestral hall.

Xiao Lu observed Uncle Shek with punctilio to ensure that she would do everything right in lighting the joss sticks, like where to place them. Uncle Shek was a stickler for getting things right.

Xiao Lu's family roots were in Foshan. Her great great great grandparents had farmed the lands and raised family, and this had continued through the generations until about 50 years ago. Uncle Shek was the last farmer before technology took over everything in Foshan. They call it the Farming Technology Revolution. Now drones and automated machines do all the farming. Uncle Shek still reminisces about the old times.

Uncle Shek laid out the dishes. Chicken marinated to perfection, assorted vegetables, fresh fish with a delicious sauce and a lovely boiled soup. "A delicious dinner Uncle. Lucky I'm not living with you otherwise I would get very fat indeed!" Xiao Lu joked.

"You youngsters are not getting the exercise we once did. You don't even walk these days. Its always drones. Drone here, drone there."

"That's why I'm in the gym every day, Uncle. More people walk and exercise on the pavements now that there is less vehicle traffic. More space is made available."

"Well, they should take advantage of it. Health is Wealth".

"Thank you for the wonderful dinner."

Uncle Shek always had the last say. They embraced before Xiao Lu stepped into the drone and gave the drone instructions to go home.

When she got home, she planned the next day's activity. Maybe venture into Macao? It is a bit crowded there with the entertainment complexes and theme parks. Macao had changed since its gambling enclave days. Gambling casinos were still around but those were overshadowed by the theme parks, entertainment theatres and family leisure parks. Tourists from all over the world converged onto Macao at all times of the year. Drones had to be shared due to the limited drone parking spaces.

-2 weeks later-

The drone lands outside the Hong Kong restaurant He Wei booked on the 8th floor. The receptionist greets Xiao Lu on the balcony and shows her in.

He Wei is seated at the table and stands up.

"You're finally here! It's great to see you in person again."

Food is brought to them by a combination of robot and human waiters. The human element is still essential in the service industry.

They catch up and talk nonstop. It's 3 hours by the time they finish the meal.

"It's my turn!". He Wei pays. The itemized bill image floats and appears in front of her one foot away. He Wei says "OK" to the bill, and the bill is settled.

"You know in the past, waiters had to bring paper bills, take your credit card, process it on a machine and then bring it back to you to sign?" Xiao Lu said, having done some research on the old videos that were archived.

He Wei raised her eyebrows. "That doesn't sound efficient at all! You're always giving me bits and pieces of history. It's my turn now. You know what, Shenzhen now has the world's largest stock market by market capitalization." He Wei worked in the financial industry.

Xiao Lu chuckled. “That doesn’t surprise me. Global Tech companies which have listed in Shenzhen for the past 20 years have been phenomenal.”

“Everyone wants to be in Shenzhen. But to be fair, Hong Kong is not doing too badly as well. I travel to Shenzhen every other week. Takes me 10 minutes by drone. I prefer living in Hong Kong. Still has its charm. The country parks for walking, the dai pai dongs for street food. And still a shopping metropolis. And the stunning scenery at night. The view of the harbour is still wonderful”.

Xiao Lu reflected on life now in the megalopolis of Greater Canton compared to the past. Everything was so much more convenient now. The improvement in the living standards of the people of the area as a whole was amazing. The whole of Greater Canton had been transformed into the most advanced area in the world. And Xiao Lu was proud to be living in it, and to be part of it.

There had been numerous challenges. It had needed top government officials to pave the way to let drones fly freely over Greater Canton within stipulated boundaries. This then had knock on effects on reducing vehicle transportation and creating a cleaner road environment. Technology had improved considerably such that factories were almost all automated processing. Accuracy was improved. No more was the Made in China label considered a joke or cheap by the international community.

Technological advances have made Greater Canton safe in terms of travel. Very rarely do drones crash. The last one happened 5 years ago. Consider this against the statistics with millions of drones in the skies.

One disadvantage though is that drones tend to block out the sky from people. Except for no-fly zone areas. Maybe something had to be done to improve the situation. Xiao Lu considered sending a message to the municipal government on ideas to improve the skyline. Maybe the cities could copy what Hong Kong and Macao were doing by making very strict large no fly zone areas. This also protected bird and insect species.

It was important to keep Greater Canton as evergreen as possible, given the attractions and inevitable migration of people to the area. The rivers that run through Greater Canton must be kept mellifluous and constant, to attract an ever-growing population.

The delectation enjoyed by those living in, working in and visiting the Greater Canton area must be able to withstand the process of change. And change for the better.

He Wei had a client in Zhuhai. Xiao Lu asked if she could join her for the trip. Xiao Lu would like to see Zhuhai, having not been there for a few years, and to see how it had progressed.

Zhuhai was renowned for its industrial output such as electronics and computer technology, biotechnology and pharmaceutical production. In the past there were many factory workers working hard to produce such products. The factories here and indeed in the other major cities were very well equipped and automated.

He Wei’s client was in the pharmaceutical production process. Given her strong relationship with her client, they allowed Xiao Lu to tour the factory floor with He Wei and the factory manager. They wore protective overalls to ensure they would not pollute the productions process. Robots, mini drones, automated arms and pincers were doing all the work on the factory line preparing medicine tablets. There was no one on the factory floor. It was an awesome sight. The factory manager said that the lines worked on a sempiternal basis, which meant it never stopped. How about that for efficiency!

He Wei suggested a quick round of golf at Zhongshan in the afternoon. A quick 10-minute drone ride away. Nothing much has changed. You can enjoy the bright skies

without drones here. It's drone free. They had to take an electric taxi from the drone park. The Greater Canton Area boasts some of the best golf courses in the world. International competitions occur frequently here. Zhongshan has a lot of history, its name coming from the founder of the Republic of China.

The golf course was in immaculate condition. The irrigation systems and greenkeeping were all automated. Robot teachers at the golfing bays taught players how to play by putting body limbs in the right places. Xiao Lu didn't really like it that much. She thought that it took out the individualism. Besides – is the robot playing in the perfect way? No one knows.

Was life in Greater Canton the perfect life? Xiao Lu couldn't answer that.

But she did know that it was the closest form of utopia that existed on the planet.

Angel

St. Stephen's Girls' College, Ho, Cheuk Yan Grace – 15

The blizzard-slash-sandstorm tore at my body, whipping strands of unkempt hair in my face, stinging.

The months in the Wastes have not been good to me. Where the sandy ground melted into glass under the rad, I could see my reflection. Pain, starvation and desperation was etched onto my face, plain as day.

My face was sallow, even more so than before. Stringy hair clung to my frame. My cheeks were sunken, skin pulled taut over bone. And around my eyes, I could see the lines at the corners, testament to happier days when I could still truly smile, not paste the disgusting monstrosity onto my features.

And my eyes themselves, once playful and doe-like, now haggard and empty.

In the Wastes some say that at night, lean, skeletal, soulless monsters would roam the place carrying a scythe, black rags dragging in their wake as they search for tormented souls and feed on their fear.

I guess that would be a pretty accurate description of my appearance.

I do believe these monsters exist. Not in the way the rumors say, but clothed in flesh and blood and fine silks and jewelry, not condemned, but celebrated; But nevertheless, feared.

As Voltaire said, “It is forbidden to kill; therefore, all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.”

Some things never change, I thought as I leaned back on the roof and gazed at the night sky. Or what would have been the night sky behind all the smog and radiation.

The Wastes were once glorious, I heard, before the elements and whatnot set in. In fact, a century ago, they called it the Greater Bay Area. As if there was anything great about it.

Now all that was left was a few islands scattered here and there, covered in trash and derelict buildings, like moldy bread crumbs nobody cared to pick up.

It was getting light soon. I brushed dust off my knees and picked my way down towards the ground. No time to squander if I were to go to sleep without an empty stomach.

I don't get my hopes up unnecessarily.

I passed through unpaved alleys, skipping over ruts and puddles on the muddy streets, fiddling with a length of stained metal tapered to a point.

I turned a corner and I found what I was looking for: a stretch of land riddled with crumbling knee-high walls. I find a good spot and crouch, making sure that my makeshift hunting knife was ready at a hole the size of a fist at the base of a wall.

I wait... and there was it. A furry brown snout poking out.

I raise my blade and stabbed.

A screech resonated from the ruins I came from. Clouds of ravens rose from their perches.

The metal shard missed and buried itself into the dirt.

I swore. No point waiting here anymore. The rodents in a 10-mile radius must be spooked, and spooked prey were not coming out their hidey holes any time soon.

I might as well go back and see what the noise was about. That screech was peculiar. Sounded like a mobile stopping. But who would stop their mobile in here? Maybe it broke down. Anyone with enough cash to buy a mobile surely had enough cash for food. More than

enough for me given the right amount of nicking. I pushed myself up and retrieved my blade, and started striding back, a smile gracing my face.

I might not have to go hungry after all.

The commotion was caused by a mobile, just as I thought. The vehicle, a marriage of luxury and practicality with its extravagant interior and large capacity, was parked in the middle of the former Town Square, its sleek white exterior gleaming as it stood proud in the middle of the square, its engine purring in the silence. Flaring headlights illuminated the night, casting its beams onto the surroundings.

A tent was set up at the edge of the clearing, the red fabric billowing in the wind, standing out like a flag against the stark palette of the ruins. A gang of kids were huddled underneath. Exclamations of joy emanated from the kids as a tall willowy figure passed. I recognized a few of them, Margot, Stefan, kids relying on scavenging food from corpses a few miles away on the No Man's Land.

The figure flitted around, and as it stopped by a lamp, I could briefly see her features. I couldn't help but gasp.

She was quite an old woman. By old, I meant around thirties-something, older than the Wastes' inhabitants. A sad thing really, when becoming a teenager was lucky and reaching adulthood like winning the lottery. But war is no light matter, and no one in their right mind would help the refugees first.

Apprehension and desperation fought within me. Maybe there was food. Maybe the woman was just trying to help. My feet carried me forward against my dwindling willpower.

There was food. A lot of it.

My belly growled.

My willpower crumbled into ashes.

It was almost like a dream. Sitting on a cushion in a warmly lit tent, a tuna sandwich thrust into my palm, and no one to take it--it was almost Paradise.

The woman reached me as I stared at the bread in wonder. Yet I couldn't care less if she thought me mental.

"How is it? Do you need more?" She smiled and asked.

In a stupor, I stiffened. Something about the accent...

"Great, thanks, I'd..."

She shifted and I recognized the insignia embroidered on her right sleeve.

I dropped the bread, brandishing my blade from a pocket, and spat, "You're a bloody Rightie."

I wasn't loud, but somehow the whole tent heard.

There was a moment of silence, and bedlam ensued. Dozens of people were rushing to the exit.

A kid screamed bloody murder.

I shouldn't have hoped. Hoping means climbing up a ladder. And the higher you climb, the worse you fall.

Starvation makes one desperate, and desperation makes one a fool.

In an instant, the tent was empty, except for the woman, standing alone, her face an unreadable mask.

I regret not finishing the meal. Even though it might be spiked. Maybe drugged or poisoned. I assume that the Rightie wasn't even here. News from the front claimed the Right Wing had invented a type of hologram that could be projected from afar, and was so real there was no way to tell if a person or object was present or not without touching it.

“Hi.”

I look up from my spot on the ground. I nearly spit out the piece of bark I was chewing on. It was the Rightie. I hoisted myself into a better position, palming my blade.

She shifted on the balls of her feet, “Look, I just wanted to help. Please. I have food, some meager resources and medical skills.”

“You're a Rightie.” It was a statement., not a question.

“Yes, but my political views don't change anything.”

“They do.”

“They don't.”

I was getting frustrated. Won't she understand? “Righties are not supposed to help Lefties, or vice versa. That was the way of the world. Our views make us different, distinguishing the right from the wrong. What we think is part of our being. It takes up the entirety of our lives.”

“I stand with the Left Wing, and I agree that to the expense of human resources and comfort, we should be immediately taking action to preserve Mother Nature. You guys think the quality of life of the people should be prioritized over the environment, and that we should focus on leaving the planet. Our interests are at odds. I'm not so foolish as to hope for the best.”

She was silent.

I go back to chewing my piece of bark. I could almost pretend that it was bread and meat.

“See the bricks on the wall over there?” I pointed, “The plants cannot help but destroy the bricks as they grow. And the bricks, though broken, pierce and cut the leafy tendrils with shrapnel. We're not meant to mix. Now go back to your pretty mobile and get outta here.” She started to protest. I silenced her with a wave of my hand, “I came from this far-right settlement in Changsha. They string up Lefties at crossroads by their wrists, and every single person, even the smallest toddler, is required by the Law to punish the offenders, regardless of their connections.” I mimed whipping a lash onto the wall, “My former parents betrayed me. They did not shed a tear.”

“But the justice of the Law is peculiar. I was not sixteen yet, so they dumped me in the middle of a barren place instead of shooting me in the head after the ordeal. I found my way here, but guess what? The Left cities are scared. They do not let us in for fear of spies.” I laughed darkly, “I guess we can't blame them. So all the refugees stay here. They used to send us food by drone, but since the war escalated...” I shrugged, “Don't mind the kids. They're jumpy, and with good reason. Whatever your intent was coming here, shoo.”

I hated her for her naivety, her foolishness. I hate her for getting my hopes up, and letting me fall.

Wordlessly, she shook her head. Without looking, she took a piece of bread from her pack and bit into it

She passed another loaf of bread to me from her rucksack and boosted me up. I could feel her warm hand.

She started to leave. I called after her, “What is your name?”

She looked bac over her shoulder and gave me a radiant smile, “My name is Angel. How about yours?”

I smile wryly, “I thought my name does not exist. Maybe it does.”

Angel disappeared behind a corner. In a detached fashion, I noticed that in some parts of the walls, the vines were holding the bricks together.

“Hi.”

This was the second time I saw her.

“Hey.”

Angel squatted next to me on the steps of the cathedral.

I stretch, “Funeral’s in there. I expect you’re here for that?”

“Partly.”

There was a stretch of silence. We stared ahead at the sunset.

“It’s been four decades,” I said.

“True.”

“You don’t look a day older and here I am, wrinkles and old age’s full glory. I’ve changed, haven’t I?”

“No.”

I raise my eyebrow.

Angel shrugged, “Not much. I see the years haven’t dampened your fiery spirit.”

“You talking bout fiery spirit? I’m no longer pulling blades on people.”

She shrugged again.

The bells rang.

I stood up, bless my aching joints, and dusted myself off. It was seven sharp. Funeral was starting.

The speaker was a portly man in his fifties. His carrying voice reverberated in the cathedral, “Today we sit here in the memory Miss Shalom On. My name is Stefan. Like many of us, I can’t help but love her for her candor, her bluntness, her stubbornness. Then again, like many of us, I can’t help but be annoyed by her candor, her bluntness, her stubbornness.”

A wave of short-lasting laughter swept through the crowd. I frown.

“Despite all her misgivings, we can agree that she was a great woman. Our lives have changed, turned upside down... but for the better.”

“From a time of darkness, she brought us to light; From a time of misgivings, she brought us to trust; From a world of turmoil she brought us to her namesake, peace.”

Angel whispered to me, “Sounds like quite a hero.”

I sniffed, “That’s a whole pile of trash. Heroes are just over-glorified ordinary people who were just doing right things in right conditions.”

He continued, “At fifteen, she was exiled from her settlement in Changsha, spurned, rejected by her loved ones due to political differences. She made her way to the island formerly known as Hong Kong, now renamed as Shalom Island in the Greater Bay Area, where she founded the Olive Branch Society, dedicated to holding talks between the two political parties the country was divided into, the start of her lifelong political goal. There, she encouraged me to leave the scavengers’ way. She was so passionate, so filled with hope. I thought she was a fool, but apparently her dedication was contagious.”

“It was hard at first. We had a rough time getting enough food or water or shelter in the Wastes because they were, obviously, Wastes. Miss On would always give the best to us and the worst for herself. Later on, the Society blossomed, but those days were embedded deep in our memories.”

“At thirty-one, Miss On held a pivotal role in the negotiations of the famed Guangzhou Peace Treaty, as well as the Foshan Accords, which provided the basic human rights to all citizens of the country and ensured the environment was protected.”

“Throughout her life, Miss On made peace with different districts and brought the country back into a united front to face the climate crisis. She was so devoted to her work she had no time to rest. Every time we hear the news of her admission to the hospitals after collapsing from tiredness, our heart aches. For her, we are thankful.”

“We all love Miss On. Without her, we cannot imagine how bad this world would be. Maybe it wouldn’t even exist. She was a great woman, a great leader and a great peacemaker. We are all greatly in debt to her.”

Someone from the crowd sniffled.

“I would like to conclude this speech with two of Miss On’s quotes. She once said, ‘Heroes are just ordinary people doing right things under the right circumstances.’ Everyone can be a hero, and Miss On is proof of that. She also said, ‘Hope is like a flame; it can be snuffed out, extinguished, but it can be shared and relit.’ And she has passed this flame to us.”

“I believe Miss Shalom On would like us to continue to spread hope and peace throughout the world. We are not so foolish to hope that we can achieve what she has achieved, but in her memory, we will do our own parts and spread the light.” Stefan bowed and retreated to his seat.

I wrinkled my nose in disgust, “That pompous old fool Stefan, the only thing he’s good for is making up pretty speeches.” I ignored the wetness on my sleeves after I had dabbled them on my eyes. I was losing my touch these days.

The congregation started to line up to pay their last respects to the deceased. I turned to leave. I’ve always hated that particular part of funerals. No the corpse won’t wake up and say anything to you. This time, it just felt too sad. Angel trailed behind me.

I returned to my spot on the cathedral steps and sigh. Angel resumed her spot beside me. And we sat in silence.

The Sun set, its rays dipping below the horizon. Somewhere, a raven cawed.

I asked Angel, “How did you come here?”

She replied, eyes still glued to the sight of the clear sky, “Shipwreck after a visit to one of those islands in the Greater Bay Area. Then I was here.”

“I never thought it would ever be great. Remember the old days?”

“It wouldn’t have been great without you.”

I scoff, “As I said, I’m no hero. You’re the hero. My colleagues in the Society are the heroes. Me, I just want everyone including me to have good food, good place, good life. I just gave them hope.”

“Spoken like a true hero.”

There was no use arguing.

The scent of acrid smoke wafted out. The body was being cremated.

“It’s time. Will you, Shalom On, come with me?” Angel stood up and reached a hand to me.

I took it, “Yes.”

And together we rose up, into the heavens.

I did not look back. I knew I was leaving this world in good hands--The hands of hopeful humankind.

Slabs

West Island School, Eyunni, Gayathri – 14

Falling. Slowly, into darkness. Around me the earth is turning, gradually getting smaller and smaller, almost gone... Then it stops. A surge of power propels me back to the top. Ambition. The driving force behind most of our actions, what makes us feel pride in what we do. It is surely a good thing, in healthy doses. But once you cross the line, it could be blinding. Its bright rays of light stop you from coming back to earth after having taken off into space, because once you're there, you don't know how to come back...

The clock had struck midnight hours ago, but I didn't know the exact time. Crickets chirped loudly outside as if they were anticipating something that was to come... had they sensed my fear? It was a new moon day; the only light that found my eyes were from a distant building that I could barely make out through the thick trees that surrounded my lonely home. 1, 2, 3... the clock chimed three times. Sleep had cursed me with the unfortunate phenomenon of sweaty palms, negative thoughts, a throbbing headache and breathlessness. It is a wonder, how you are often the greatest barrier stopping you from doing something. We like to blame others for our panic, but it is really ourselves who create this sense of fear. We are our worst enemy, an enemy we have no weapon against. We are left in the darkness of our own terror, then we realise that our greatest fear is ourselves.

I sat on my seat, directly below where they sat. Them, the ones who decided everything that happened. Their faces stern, an expression that rarely changes. A mask, perhaps, of professionalism, hiding the greed and ambition that resided deep down. I wondered what it would be like if I were one of them. If I was able to make decisions that affected the future of everyone. Like a lion, would I sit in my den all day, while my kin went out to bring food for me? Or like a bee, would I create a successful society, where everyone knows their roles and can work independently? My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the announcement addressed to all sitting in the grand hall. They were to now launch their new plan. Something that was to be revolutionary, something that would bring us all the 'nectar' we had been searching for, like insects on flowers. Around me there was excitement; shuffling and bubbling. But I sat with a placid face. I was not tempted by any of these 'plans' they created for us.

I glanced up into the ceiling, something created to shield us from the harsh rays of the sun in the summer, the pouring rain in the monsoon, and the cold in the winter. It was there on good intentions, with a good purpose. But in a rush to create something so large, one had neglected the small potential problems. Like the small cracks in the material, the gaps where

it met the walls, the faded colours... flaws were present at every step. Yet no one had done anything to fix it; no one had even taken a look. It scares me sometimes, how many of us were born with the gift of perfect sight, but we act as though we cannot see.

The plan had now been announced. The buzz of enthusiasm resumed. It was going to be something beyond what our world had ever seen. We were all shown a block, the third largest in the world. A block which was filled with many smaller slabs. The plan described the merging of the eleven bottom most slabs, out of which two were situated outside the block, linked by a thin string built for connectivity. This was a special block, which held a great amount of power. The merging of these slabs would bring about great changes... positive or negative, I still wasn't sure. They had told us that the merging of these slabs would mean the implementation of innovation-driven development to further deepen the partnership of these slabs, which together created the block. All around me there were intrigued and curious faces, ready to embark on a journey to find out whether this plan would come into our existent world, or remain a fantasy in a block.

Shades of pink and orange filled my eyes. The sun – a perfect circle of radiating white light – slowly setting in the distance. I gazed down at the current version of myself. I walked around and watched it follow me. A black silhouette that came with me everywhere I went. Early in the morning, I appeared tall and thin. As the sun took its place in the middle of the sky, making us plead for a shield from its burning rays, I was small, sometimes absent. As the final rays of light shone at the perfect angle, I was as tall as ever. I smiled at this version of my myself and pondered over the mysterious presence of this entity. If I moved my hand, it would move its hand. If I took a step backwards, it would take a step backwards. But if I smiled, it wouldn't smile back. If I blinked, it wouldn't blink back. It was like a plan, a first step towards creating a full flesh and bone being. Only its shape could be seen; its exterior. There were no inner features or details, no depth or feeling. Without the interior, the exterior was nothing. Just a plain shell without any real characteristics. A careless attempt at creating something – neglecting the subtleties, and the existing problems that appeared invisible on the surface.

I don't hate optimism, but I never found a reason to like it either. People called me many names. Pessimist, doubter, killjoy... you name it. But I would always refer to myself as a realist. Someone who saw the sometimes obvious but more often subtle faults in all the ambitious dreams we humans created. It was my gift.. Or weakness. There were times when I wished I could just see the beauty and goodness in everything. However, every time, I would try only to realise, that there was never not a blemish; nothing is perfect. Even the highest beings in our universe have a flaw. Something minute, that only some will ever notice. Personally, I thought that the plan was heavy on ideas but light on implementation. The ones who had created it had imagined a utopian world where everything went our way. I begged to differ.

I unfolded the blueprint and caressed the creases that divided the area into many parts. Each section with its own identity and features. I was told that it had been drawn with attention to the finest details. But all I could see was an outline, eleven slabs to be fitted together. This would be the perfect plan, I was told, one which would bring us the greatest benefit. Each slab looked the same on the outside. But in reality, the insides were far from similar. Each slab was made up of various smaller blocks, each different from the next. How would we know how these smaller blocks would behave if they were merged with others? The blueprint only focused on the big picture, the one we could see from the outside. But how could we be sure that putting these slabs together wouldn't break the insides? Like two elements... when alone, each element has their own unique properties. But when bonded together, the properties of the new compound could be entirely different from its individual elements. Except here, there was no way for us to test this ignored possibility. I stared at the blueprint for a while, the clock ticking in the background. A short, blunt pencil found its way into my sweaty palm. I fiddled with it, moving it from one palm to the other, turning it, feeling all its sides and edges. As I sharpened it, I noticed how with a little effort, something useless could be turned into something very useful. Holding my pencil tightly, I placed in the centre of the page. Then my hand took over. Lines, circles, squares... filling each slab with its smaller counterparts. I uncovered all the secrets that had been contained in each of the slabs, which swift and smooth strokes.

I had been sitting in my seat for over two hours and I was starting to get cramps. I longed for a tall glass of cold water, but I couldn't stop, not now. My mind raced as my hand furiously moved from one side of the paper to the other, then back again, and again, until the entire paper for filled with words. It is really quite amazing, what we can do when we put our mind to it. I was finally finished. My hand ached as I lifted my heavy copper water bottle off my desk, and allowed the last few drops of water to quench my thirst. I sat back in my chair and stared at what I had written. It was only after a few moments, with a pen in my hand, I started to read, and dwell deep into the dystopian world.

Rivalry. Competition. Superiority. We all feel it, against another person, another team, another family, another city... another world even. There are not many places where rivalry isn't present. Paradise perhaps, but even there, even in the most perfect place we can imagine, someone or something is fighting for something against someone else. It could be many things: a smile from someone, the ability to climb a tree, a piece of gold... we often find ourselves feeling rivalry over strange and absurd objectives, but in the moment, it feels as though it is the only thing that matters; the only thing we must accomplish. But what if we don't? What if the rival wins? Some may brush it aside, let it go. Others may break, like a fragile piece of glass in a powerful storm. I was thinking about this, as I considered the flaws in the plan. Recently, each slab had started to form a new rivalry that they had been silently dealing with. Alone, it was bearable. But if they were together? No one knew how they would react. The ones who wrote the plan surely knew about this rivalry; they were the ones who experienced the essence of it in their attempts to create the partnership. Yet they failed to address it, and didn't mention whether they would be there to step in if any conflict occurred. If any one of the slabs was acting as a participant, not a competitor, it would allow the other slabs to develop but would shatter its own long-term goals. Were we going to risk the downfall of one of the slabs, for the sake of the development of others?

The council sat around a huge wooden table, its edges serrated from its many years of service. The lines on the wood swirled and swivelled, dancing, to create many unique patterns filled with different shades of brown. I sat on my seat, the fabric torn and worn out. The cushioning had sunk so low that my eye-level was below everyone else's. I had chosen that seat with the intention of being less noticed, but then I saw the eyes fall on me as I uncomfortably shuffled, trying to find a position that wouldn't leave my back in pain afterwards. My briefcase stood on its side beside the leg of my chair. The briefcases of most others in the hall were clean, and plain, but mine was scratched and dented, burdened with tags from many trains and aeroplanes I had taken. Travelling was my way of finding out how we were different from others. It was interesting, I thought, how all humans are fundamentally the same species, yet we are all so different in the way we look, we think or we speak. What we find interesting could be a bore to a group of people in another part of the world. One underestimated how much you can learn from just meeting someone else. I pondered over this as the leader began to speak.

After a long half of an hour of words going through one ear and coming out of the other, it was finally my turn to speak. My knees were shaking, my heart was beating so hard I thought it may break my ribs. Pearls of sweat started to form on my forehead, in contrast with the cold feeling I had in my stomach. I was about to do what many considered impossible... contradict the leaders.

Imagine telling someone to make soup, but now telling them how to. You elaborate on the effects of that soup and how it could cure many diseases like cold, cough and so on. But how will the person make it? It is often said, 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime'. But on a more negative note, if you don't teach a man to fish, you leave him in a situation where he doesn't know what to do, and is left in the cruel hands of doubt and hopelessness. The plan envisioned hundreds of policy directions and goals, but didn't specify exactly how they would execute them. The plan may have been there to provide ways to strengthen the existing systems and find weaknesses that need to be fixed, but with a lack of guidance, is there really anyway this will be possible? 'Actions speak louder than words'... simply stating something and expecting it to happen is useless and redundant. There must be action, or else, we will all fail.

“Speak louder.”

I addressed the council softer than I should have, receiving looks of confusion on the members' faces. I cleared my throat and began again. I had a strange habit of rapidly moving my fingers when I was nervous, as if I was playing a piano.

It started when I was young... the piano was my most favourite thing in the world. I would spend every moment of my free time making music on its black and white keys. There would be days when I wouldn't leave the comfort of the magnificent instrument, until my mother would call me out and threaten to sell the piano to the local music center. Whenever I was nervous, my first instinct would be to engage with the piano. I would be captured in the

moment, losing myself to the beautiful melody and rhythm, forgetting all else, including my own existence. Once I was back to reality, from my glimpse into the spiritual world, I would feel rejuvenated, energised.

At that moment, all talking, shuffling and whispering stopped; silence. We were trapped in a pocket of time. My voice quivered as I began reading my paper...

Freedom. What does it actually mean? Freedom could be like capturing a snake. The snake sheds its skin to leave us in the relic of its trickery as a souvenir of our desire. Or is freedom like the wind? We don't know it exists until we see its impact on other things, like the swaying of the tree, the ripples in water, paper plates flying away, hair blowing. Is it like a muscle? Something we must exercise in order to develop and keep healthy, a blessing but also a burden. Or is freedom like the fresh air we breathe, or the clean water we drink. We don't realise it's there until someone takes it from us. Whatever it may be, it is something that is valued by most communities as something very important. For example, one of the slabs that lies outside the box, linked by a thin piece of string, has enjoyed its hard-earned freedom having been by itself with only a small connection to the main box. But would the plan now take that away? I had many doubts, as to whether the plan would be able to preserve the uniqueness of the slab, whilst allowing it to grow and develop.

I was back in the comfort of my room. But this time, I wasn't nervous anymore. I had finally played my part. I had informed the council on how the plan had many gaps that needed to be filled, like cavities on people's teeth. Without filling them, the whole product would not be able to function. Whether they would listen to me or not, was up to them, but I had at least made them aware of the situation and the complications. I sat back in my chair.

There are two types of stories. The ones with happy endings, and the ones without. We often read the books with happy endings, afraid that the latter will be disheartening; we may not 'enjoy' them. But really, we are only too scared to open them because of the fear of being wrong. We are scared that we may discover that everything we thought was wrong, or that we would never be able to fulfill our dreams and desires. But it is only when we open those books that we understand the reality of our world, because believing in fantasies will never work in our favour. It is only when we understand how the real world works, that we can truly do something to change it.

For once, I was satisfied.

Future Tales of the Greater Bay Area

West Island School, Mak, Clovis – 15

I wake up as the human leader pulls the cloth off my cage. Ruffling my feathers and straightening them out, I peer out through the thin metal bars surrounding me, and see the human leader smiling at me. He is wearing a crisp black suit, and is accompanied by two servants, each holding various cleaning tools. He delivers a command to them and gives me one last glance before turning around and striding out of the room. One of the servants carefully opens the cage door, and washes me in warm water, while the other cleans my pristine prison and sets up dishes of food and water. Ten minutes later, they put me back in the cage, and left.

Two weeks ago, on a cold winter night, I was flying over Shenzhen, minding my own business, and enjoying the spectacular night view. Beneath me were countless skyscrapers, lit up with brilliant, colourful lights, stretching up towards the sky. The streets far below me were filled with streaks of bright yellow as various vehicles zipped past. I tucked my wings, and spun into a vertical dive, feeling the exhilarating whoosh of air as I hurtled closer and closer to the ground. Twenty metres above the ground, I turned out of my dive and slowly descended, until I perched on top of a lamp post. Joined by a young pigeon, I watched as people hurriedly rushed about their busy lives. As I watched, I searched my memories. I have lived for a very long time, and I still remember around 30 years ago, when Shenzhen was just a fishing village, small, and filled with farmland. Now, the city has grown to be a sprawling metropolis, with a population of over 12 million people. A wing tapping on my feathers brought me back to reality, as the pigeon pointed down to a nearby street, where two men were holding mysterious contraptions in their arms, both pointing at us. The pigeon looked at me and whispered: “I think they are aiming at us...”. Sensing danger, we both frantically flapped our wings and flew off the lamp post, but then I felt a stabbing pain in my chest, and everything turned to darkness.

That is how I ended up here. Not long after I regained consciousness, I met the human in charge. He looked very happy to see me, although I did not know why. He would sometimes come over to my cage, and talk to me, but often it was just his servants that would feed and clean me. Nonetheless, I was not happy with being imprisoned. Two weeks after my capture, I had finally decided I would escape. I would have gone ahead with my plan this morning, but I thought it would be easier if the human leader was not here: less humans, easier escape. So, I merely waited, and as night fell, I decided to sleep earlier, to give me more energy tomorrow.

I am feeling lucky right now. The man is not here, and the two servants are coming over to my cage now. I stare at them and get ready. The first servant opens the cage door, and I suddenly flash out of the cage, wings flapping furiously as I brush past the second servant’s arm, and rush towards the massive balcony doors. I quickly realise my mistake – the glass doors are closed. With a screech of frustration, I turn back in a stunning spiral, twisting and turning through the servants, who are now yelling for help. I accelerate down a corridor, and as I pass the third room, I finally see an open window, albeit just about open, and am thankfully agile enough to slow down and fly into the room. Hearing many loud voices behind now, I heighten my focus, and zoom out the room through the narrow opening, into the magnificent morning sky.

I am glad to be free, and take a deep breath, savouring the outside air. I look back and see that I have escaped from a grand residential building with a modern, unique design, located near the centre of the city. I circle around it, and with sudden alarm, I see over a dozen humans pouring out of the entrance, shouting unknown words, and pointing everywhere. I fly upwards, towards a sheet of white clouds, hoping to get far away from those people. As the beating of my wings becomes a consistent rhythmic pattern, I wonder when I can head back without being hunted. I decide that it is better to be safe than sorry; I will live somewhere else for now until I think it is safe to return. I glide down from the clouds, and see that I am already far, far away from my previous prison. Hundreds of metres below me, I spot a train, moving at a high speed, heading out of Shenzhen. I recognise it as one travelling the Guangzhou - Shenzhen - Hong Kong Express Rail Link. I have decided. I will follow this train, and I will see where this brings me.

The train travels very quickly, and I have to fly quickly to keep up with it. Thankfully, the journey was not that long, and less than half an hour later, the train has reached the West Kowloon terminus in Hong Kong. I have heard a lot about this city, but I have never been here. I am in awe. This city has a shocking resemblance to Shenzhen, with modern architecture and bustling streets, but also contains colossal mountains, massive country parks, and carefully preserved historical sites. Not far from me, a gigantic skyscraper reaches up towards the sky, its cuboid structure towering over me as I glide away from the railway. I decide to head towards Central, a flourishing business district right next to Victoria Harbour, which separates Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. As I fly across Victoria Harbour, I see several green and white ferries cruising slowly across, each and every one packed full of delighted passengers enjoying the view. Ahead of me, another imposing skyscraper looms over its surroundings, facing off against the previous skyscraper, two giant sentinels standing at attention over the cityscape. As I finally reach the other end of the harbour, I pass by a line of piers, each sending ships off towards various destinations on outlying islands. What better way to get used to my new home than visiting one of its most popular tourist areas? Flying into the sea of skyscrapers that is the Central area, I am surrounded by countless shops selling various merchandise from high end fashion companies, arranged in several shopping malls that sit below numerous offices. Hundreds of people walk the streets below me, with taxis, minibuses, buses, trams and other vehicles roaming the roads. Far above me, the rumble of an aeroplane's engines thunders through the air as the immense machine roars through the sky. This feels just like home, maybe even busier, I thought. A Eurasian tree sparrow flits across to me, and asks me if I'm new here. I nod, and he chirps: "I figured, you got that astounded look on your face, many visitors are like that. This place has seen great economic prosperity for recent years. How about I bring you somewhere that has great food for you to try?". I remember I haven't eaten since yesterday, when I was living in the human's residence, and I reply: "Of course, that would be great, I'm starving!"

The sparrow leads the way, navigating his way through the streets with ease, expertly avoiding electric cables and skimming through narrow alleys, until we finally reach a narrow street with several food stalls arranged along it. A couple dozen people are sitting on worn out wooden stools, around small round tables, with bowls of steaming hot congee, small plates of noodles and rice noodle rolls. My companion speeds forward past the first five stalls, and finally stops and hovers in the air as he reaches the sixth and last stall. I am surprised, as he seems to not be worried about humans at all; Perhaps it was just my previous experience that made me feel that humans could not be trusted. Nonetheless, I head forward, and join him, hovering outside the opening of the restaurant. He points with his wing and announces:

“This is one of the many restaurants in Hong Kong which sells congee which is one of the most traditional types of food Hong Kong has! The woman that runs this place recognises me, and will always give me some food to eat. Let’s go!” We fly in together, and perch onto the counter. A kind looking woman in her sixties looks up at us, and smiles at the sparrow. She reaches her hand forward towards him, and I flap my wings in alarm, but he merely stands there as the woman gently strokes his feathers. The woman then turns and stares at me for a while, and murmurs something under her breath, seemingly shocked at my appearance. She then turns around and gets to work in the kitchen, whisking around pots and pans with expert skill. The sparrow looks back at me, and assures me: “Relax, I’ve visited this place for the last two years. This human is caring and considerate, she will not hurt you. She does look very surprised to see you though, you are a very rare bird. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like you before, and I’ve been all over Hong Kong!” I replied: “My kind are from the north, and rarely come so far south. I am one of those that have travelled far away from my birthplace, and I was living in Shenzhen until recently. I wish to settle down here for a while.” My companion flaps his tiny wings in excitement and responds enthusiastically: “If you want, I can be your guide for your time here! I know a lot about Hong Kong and I can make sure you will have an amazing time here! Oh look, the food is here now!”

The old woman had returned with two tiny plates, each containing chopped up bits of youtiao (chinese breadsticks). She sets both down on the marble surface, and gently nudges them towards us. I look over to the sparrow, but he is already ravenously chowing down on his plate of youtiao, his beak aggressively pecking the golden brown dough. I tentatively take a bite out of the youtiao, and instantly hunger overwhelms me, and I also began eating voraciously. Within several minutes both our plates were completely empty, and our host put back the two plates with an amused expression on her aged face. “We should go now.” my companion announced. “I’ve got an idea; I’ll take you to some place interesting tomorrow.” he added. I nod in agreement, and with a call of thanks towards the restaurant woman, we flew out and up, soaring gracefully upwards until we disappeared from her sight.

It is night now, but just like Shenzhen, the sky is bright, filled with colourful lights from skyscrapers lining both sides of Victoria Harbour. My companion points at them, and informs me that a light show will begin soon. Right on cue, the tallest skyscraper emits a powerful beam of green light, arcing through the sky. Many others soon join in with a dazzling display of searchlights and lasers. All of a sudden, there was a massive BANG, and an explosion erupted several metres next to us, creating a colourful burst of light all around us. The sparrow turned and yelled: “The humans are releasing their fireworks! Quick, fly upwards and try and get out of this area!” I accelerated and spun upwards, narrowly avoiding the next firework as it zoomed past me and released another deafening burst of light. On my right, my companion dodged three consecutive shells with astonishing agility, even as they lit up the sky with a blinding flash. I was much faster than him though, and soon climbed to a safe altitude, while he struggled to push past the waves of explosions. I looked back with sudden horror as one of the projectiles exploded right in front of him, enveloping his body in a flash of sparks. I dived back down as he plummeted, reeling from the shock. Willing myself to fly faster and faster, I finally catch up with him, and slap him forcefully with my wings. He blinks several times, and as the water below rushes up to meet us, he finally realises his predicament and flaps his wings in panic. A wave surges up and brushes against his minuscule body as he regains control and skims across the surface of the midnight blue seawater. I glide along him, and breathe a sigh of relief. Above us, the fireworks have stopped, and all is quiet. We land on a nearby tree back on the Central side of Victoria Harbour. The sparrow looks at

me, and pauses. After a while, he finally proclaims: “Well that was an eventful day.”

It is morning, and we are on the move again. My companion has told me we will be visiting Macau, a small cluster of islands that is the most densely populated region in the world. We fly a short distance to the Kai Tak cruise terminal, which is where the humans go to take their ships. He explains that many humans will visit Macau for leisure and gambling, which I have learnt is when the humans take their chances and try and earn more money. Of course, as birds, we won't be able to truly understand what the humans are doing. Nonetheless, since the humans decide to merge Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Macau and several other areas into what they call the Greater Bay Area, all these areas have experienced great economic success, declares the sparrow. Especially Macau, which is why we are visiting as well; They also have an interesting history too! “Aha, the ferry to Macau is starting to move now. Be careful, the ship will move quite fast, especially once it moves into open water. Remember to keep focus on the ship!”

Just as he finishes speaking, a sleek red and white ship turns out of port, and we hastily follow. Soon enough, the ferry picks up speed, and begins to raise itself up and out of the water. I watch astonished, even as I breathe heavily, beginning to feel exhausted from the effort required to keep pace with the swiftly moving ship. The sparrow sees my look of surprise, and informs me in between gasping breaths that the humans have used some sort of technology that increases the speed of the ship by lifting it out of the water slightly. After that, there was only the sound of the ship's powerful engines as we kept silent, both having no energy to spare on conversation. Around one hour after our departure, we finally arrive in Macau. Overwhelming fatigue forces us to take a rest on a nearby palm tree. Once we finally regained our energy, my companion spreads his wing and announces: “Isn't this place beautiful?” Yes, yes it is. I increase my altitude, flying higher up to get a better view. Macau's past is shown in its architecture, with many buildings dating back over a hundred years. Yet Macau's reputation for being a resort city filled with casinos is also true, with luxurious hotels and over 30 casinos. I spend the rest of the day exploring the territory with my companion, visiting historic sites such as the Ruins of St. Paul's, and circling the Venetian hotel casino, hoping to catch a glance of the extravagance inside. Time flies however, and as night approaches, we follow the last ferry of the day back to Hong Kong island.

Several years have passed. I have lived here in Hong Kong with my friend, the sparrow, for a long long time, nesting in a beautiful country park, but now I feel like it is time to return home. To Shenzhen. Back where I truly belong. I bid farewell to my friend, and promise to return next winter. Looking back one more time, I take flight.



Fiction

Group 5

A Change for the Better

St Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School, Cudia, Kim – 16

His eyes drank in the skyline: bright lights dotted the horizon and high rises peeked through the morning haze. Aiden never loved his life in the countryside, where opportunities were as scarce as proper meals and corruption spread like disease, but he'd learnt to accept it. Yet by chance, he was here now. He could only dream of a busy city life in the Greater Bay Area, and it was about to become his.

It was only six in the morning, but the sound of people's chatter had already started to fill the air, and Hyperloops were up and running on their tracks. *0600. Good morning. Please proceed to your workstations. Today's weather is bright and cool. You may want to bring a light jacket with you. Have a lovely day.*

He tore his eyes from the window, his mind refreshed after the city's Timekeeper's first string of daily reminders. Quickly downing his cup of tea, he grabbed his bag and his Timecard and quickly swiped it across the control panel next to his door. Every house had one, for automatically logging information related to commuting time, working hours, and the like. Aiden marvelled at what for many was a quotidian act - this was one of many Greater Bay Area's technological marvels. It, as were all things, was precise down to every last detail in an effort to estimate the city's productivity.

Such was life in the heart of the Hub — that was what the Greater Bay Area was known as internationally. It was the epitome of advancement, as the bright minds behind it had orchestrated the art of routine and discipline, all while infrastructural and technological development, quality of life, and social stability was finely tuned. In fact, it was seen as the perfect world — an ideal one in any scenario because it meant new beginnings, a second chance at life. Whoever came here was given the chance to pull themselves out of poverty, and whoever left had reason to worry about their wellbeing.

As he walked to the train station, his mind rolled over the events of this past week. Seven days ago, his little sister June lay bedridden, the new strain of virus that was discovered in the villages poisoning her system and crawling its way to her heart. Six days ago, his mother, who had never once showed hesitation or fear for all his life, broke down in tears. Five days ago, he offered to break into the only hospital for miles around to retrieve medicine for June's condition. Four days ago, June's eyes fluttered shut, and his heart shattered into a million pieces. Three days ago, his mother whispered *I love you* to him, because they were the only family they had left. Two days ago, by complete and utter luck, he won the annual Lottery that admitted a total of five people from all over the country to complete an internship in the Greater Bay Area. One day ago, he waved goodbye to his mother, promising to earn enough to support her even from afar, feeling torn as ever. And... here he was now, determined not to waste his clean slate. He just couldn't afford to.

The noise of the station interrupted his thoughts. *The Hyperloop is arriving. Please allow passengers to exit first.* He found himself in the midst of a sea of people, all making phone calls and chatting about new business plans. Inside the Hyperloop was no different — each cabin was lined with cushioned seats and commuters working on their tablets, and in the far corner were booths occupied by businessmen and women discussing agendas over breakfast.

Never before had he seen such dedication to work. Even the few schoolchildren there were busy reviewing their class notes.

But that wasn't what impressed him the most. It was the fact that every single person he passed looked happy and content with themselves, in spite of the work orientated culture. He had never been anywhere before where he was met by a sea of warm, contented smiles from any and all he crossed paths with. He gazed out the full length windows at the spiralling buildings that kissed the sky, at the bridges that linked the six districts of the city, at the commuting crowds that resembled worker bees of a beehive. It seemed that everything within the borders of the Greater Bay Area had been groomed to perfection, not even a blade of grass was out of place. Judging by what he read from an introductory manual given to him after the Lottery, he knew the city's pillars was its Timekeeper, which kept everyone on their toes and reminded them when to work, rest, eat, sleep — everything. It was a flawless system, really, because it ensured the perfect balance.

He felt his stomach lurch, and the Hyperloop came to a sudden halt. Not knowing what to expect, he looked around, the frowns and mutters around him telling him something was out of place.

The questions rose to a clamour as the seconds passed, but one voice stood out: 'A MALFUNCTION?' A surly man in his fifties roared.

'This has never happened before!' A willowy young woman chimed in.

'I don't have time for this. Now we'll all be late for work.' The man's expression darkened.

'Why don't we use the emergency exit and walk? Is the next station far from here?'

Aiden suggested tentatively, shrinking back at the stares he received.

'Well... it could work,' the young woman replied, not unkindly.

And so, on his first day in the Hub, Aiden experienced a failure in the city's unrivalled, immaculately planned out framework, a flaw so rare most others were yet to experience it, too. He followed the crowd through the emergency exit, a sea of people flowing out at once like water from a broken dam. The crisp, cool morning breeze brushed his face and he relished the feeling. It reminded him of home.

Lost in his thoughts, he wandered slowly at the back of the group. *0645. Your first shift begins in fifteen minutes.* He blinked, startled by the Timekeeper, and only then realised he had taken a wrong turn. Abandoned by the stream of commuters, he had no choice but to find his way back to the city on his own. By the looks of the dense thickets on his left and the lack of skyscrapers around, he was by the outskirts of the Hub, or at least far from the central area.

The announcement sent him into a panic. He knew work started at 0700. He was late and stuck in the middle of nowhere, but he simply could not allow himself to mess his internship up. That was his ticket to giving his mom a decent life, and he wanted that bad enough it made his heart ache. *What a good first impression,* he thought dryly.

Desperate to get to his workstation and salvage his reputation, he wandered aimlessly in scattered directions. He didn't care where he was going, he just needed to move so he felt like he was doing something about it. After long minutes of walking over cracked concrete, which bewildered him slightly as that was the first anomaly he found in the otherwise well-groomed Hub, he came across a series of squat, cramped buildings made of anything imaginable, ranging from broken bamboo sticks to old car parts to flimsy planks of wood.

Stunned was a laughable understatement for what he felt. The sorry state of the makeshift houses here and the people he saw... their dirt-streaked faces and prodding eyes intimidated him, and it was so unlike anything the Greater Bay Area represented. Yet, it was also far from what the villages were like. There, it was much, much worse.

‘Who are you?’ It was a simple question, yet it felt like an accusation. His eyes found a squat, frail, old woman whose bones looked like they wouldn’t withstand a strong wind, but he had a hunch she was probably stronger than himself.

‘I’m, um... I’m Aiden. Sorry, I’m not from here... Do you know where the closest Hyperloop station is?’ He started, hesitant to meet her eyes.

She glared at him for the better half of a minute. If looks could kill, he’d be dead by now. He started to leave, but the sharpness of her voice caught him off guard.

‘Wait.’

The tension in the air was tangible, as all the residents of the area watched their exchange. ‘Come in.’

‘How did you find this place?’ Her voice was soft despite the weight the sentence seemed to carry.

‘I’m here for an internship and it’s my first day, and the train sort of broke down and I got lost. I came here by accident, I guess.’

She stayed silent. He took the opportunity to gaze around the house, which solely consisted of one dimly-lit room with a thin mattress good for two pushed against the wall, piles of worn-out clothes in every corner, and empty food cans overflowing from a tattered plastic bag. Several photos of a woman, a man, and two children, all with smiling faces, stood out against the sooty wall. Three rusted metal buckets guarded the back entrance, next to a grimy stove and a broken fridge with its door removed to reveal plates, cleaning supplies, and more non-perishable food.

‘So are you saying you won the Lottery? You’re from the villages, aren’t you? And you’re now staying in the Warzone, right?’

“‘Warzone?’” He sputtered.

‘Oh, that’s what we call the Hub,’ the woman deadpanned. ‘Because us marginalized people have to fight for our rights there. It gets bloody sometimes.’ This place was full of some nasty surprises, and it wasn’t exactly belly of the beast. I cocked an eyebrow – ‘Marginalized? What happened to you?’ I probed. ‘It wasn’t actually bloody, but it might as well have been.’ She said with a nonchalant shrug. ‘This whole society is dog eats dog. People would step on each other to become the best employee, to have the best image, to look the best in the government’s eyes. If you lag behind, or if you’re consistently at the bottom, they move you to the outskirts — if they can’t use you, they’ll dispose of you. They keep it a secret, though. They simply say you’ve gone to live with relatives abroad, or went on vacation but never came back, or quit your job for personal reasons. It makes no sense to me. Unlike the majority, I happen to have morals and I refuse to put others down for some petty number on my scoreboard. All of us here were either kicked out or left voluntarily.’

When he didn’t reply, she gave him a pointed look. ‘Think about it. Do you still want to go back? I know what it’s like growing up in the villages, I was exactly like you once. If you choose to work in the Hub, I’ll lead you back to the station. I won’t judge you, but I can’t agree with the path before you. But it’s a decision you must make yourself.’

‘Well, what else is there left to do?’ His voice rising with panic and confusion. His head swirled with emotion. He was desperate to give his mom a chance to live rather than survive; he was mourning the end of his newfound idyllic life, even if it was a lie too good

to be true; and most of all, he was scared of the consequences that would unfold, for any move he made now could change his fate forever.

Could he make a life for himself and his mother in the Hub? Would he climb to the top of the ladder and stay there? Would he be trampled over and pushed to the bottom, his hands pinned and his cheek pressed to the ground? He didn't even know if he'd rather sink or swim. He couldn't stand the thought of becoming someone who constantly mistreated others for his own benefit. If he agreed to be a part of that society, he wouldn't be any different from them.

Was it worse to be the oppressor or the oppressed?

He had to change that somehow. Even if something happened to him... no, nothing would happen to him. He still had his mother to care for, and the thought of her crying over a dead son sent chills down his spine. Should he just go back to the villages, go back to how things used to be? Back to running down dirt paths and collecting polluted river water? It might have been terrible, but it was his home.

But was there a way he could help these marginalized people who only wanted the best for others, and keep his internship in the Hub so he could take care of his mom?

'Tell you what. I'll go back to the city. I'll continue working as an intern and try to blend in. But I want to make a change in the system from within. I don't want this cycle to continue. People can't feel worthless just because someone tells them they are. I want to help you. But you need to tell me everything you know about the Hub.'

It was a beautiful moment, when her eyes lit up with the smallest spark of hope. It was small and flickering, but nonetheless shone bright. His chest swelled with pride, and he was touched at the fact that she seemed to have faith in him.

'How do you plan to do that, though?'

'We can work together. I read in my introductory manual that the Hub will have its annual Gathering later. The whole city will be there, and we can expose the government for how they've treated you, and why this system is wrong. There's no way everyone can think this is right once we lay out the facts. This could be the beginning of something much bigger than us. The Greater Bay Area was a chance for opportunity for all. Let's make that dream a reality.'

She thought for a while, biting her lip. Finally, she lifted her chin and shook his hand. 'I'm in.'

Don't Forget the Ocean

St. Paul's Convent School, Fung, Natalie – 16

I first met the ocean when I was eight.

She was a young mother, full of light and prosperity, and I watched on, giggling as she swept swirls of waves pass and around me and over me and around me again, dipping me in softly and laughing gently as I came out spluttering with all the indignance of an eight year old. Mama and Daddy looked on fondly on the sand-covered towel, sharing a coconut drink while Mama's sundress fluttered softly amongst the thrifting dance of the wind, and Daddy's sunglasses glittered in resonance with the sun's playful glare.

The ocean's gentle touches on my softly burnt skin that summer lingered all throughout the year – and eight was the start of my relationship with the ocean.

Nine, ten, eleven, twelve.

Each summer spent in the cooling embrace of the ocean with the contrasting heat of the sun and the sand jumping and yipping at the pitter-patter of my feet against the soft and hard grains. The young mother I first met grew younger and younger, into a shadow of my best friend, stifling giggles of mischiefs under each of our breaths while Mama and Daddy put on their detective glasses and we'd dissolve and succumb under the teasing tickles.

Each summer was one where we both started each new, bright day, determined to hunt for adventures amongst the shimmering waves, hunting for the newest home for Mr. Crabby or gazing in wonder at the star that fell and laid in the sand, hard and soft at the same time. Each day was a new adventure, and each year was spent waiting for the days where we'd be diving up and down among the waves.

Then thirteen came.

And the young girl that I once knew, the loving mother that I once embraced, was long gone without a shadow left behind for me to hold or hug or just touch to convince myself that it wasn't all just a feverish dream. Thirteen was when Mom held me in her trembling and frail embrace, a harsh, white gown replacing the flickering shadow of a bright yellow sundress.

Thirteen was when Auntie brought me to the ocean one night and all I saw was a weathered old man, howling with the raging beasts in the air, angry at the hand that he's been dealt at life and the aching emptiness, sealed behind a bitter old, facade. It was when I cried and howled with the man, raging for him and at him to bring back the sweet friend I tackled in the golden rays, the mother I sang and danced and laughed and played with.

Thirteen was when I no longer knew the ocean.

Thirteen was when everything was gone and lost.

Fourteen to fifteen to seventeen to eighteen was when everything stayed the same and everything changed.

The past was but a fleeting thought in the rush of a current downstream, the roar of a waterfall and the thunder of the rapids. The sun shone down on the rectangles which sucked and sucked and slowly the sun shone through the lights and the elevators and shone through the buildings and the sun was everywhere – even in the darkest of nights and the coldest of winters. The wind blew and blew until the mill turned and turned and the car roared in agreement and huffed and puffed as it raced around the city. The sun now shone through our phones and computers and notebooks and screens and the wind blew and blew through the

microphones until our ears bled from the waves.

Fourteen and eighteen and fifteen and seventeen was when I lost and found everything, where I jumped from gust and gust of wind until I found where I wanted to be and then lost the faith again in the split of a second before climbing up to another height and freefalling again. It was when I started learning how to collect the wind through small rectangles and how to collect the roaring and the meek wind while ordering the cars to run faster and faster around in circles until they were just a blur in the peripheral vision and their roars a ringing in your ear as they grew louder and sharper and softer and dimmer.

Twenty was when I met the ocean again.

Twenty, was when I strode down the road, stomping on the quaking and shivering blades of green beneath my sole, was when I ripped out the dancing flowers from their beds where they slept, where I suddenly bumped into a familiar figure halfway down the road.

It was her.

The ocean which I have not seen since I was twelve, the young girl that I neglected to see, and the young mother I once loved all wrapped up in one.

It was a figure that was achingly familiar, yet painfully foreign.

I stopped in my tracks.

The figure in front of me smiled tiredly. Gone was the light and clear girl that splashed around in the summer, or the gentle and soft mother that sang softly during under the gentle caress of the sun's beams.

No.

The figure before me was one that was filled with harsh lines. Scratches and split lines tore through her figure, and soil and plastic bags and straws and cans and all sort of things shifted in her body when she moved, no longer gracefully like she once did in a summer long ago, but moving instead with all the crankiness and rustiness of an elderly man struggling to his feet.

There was this sort of grimness to her face, a sort of resignation, that settled reluctantly in the lines of her face.

I stared.

I stared at her, mouth agape, half in horror and half in shock, at the worn out and sluggish figure in front of me. Surely, this isn't -

I reached out, carefully trying to avoid the sharp bits and pieces of sharp, yellowed plastic sticking out from her body, reaching out, with trembling hands, half with the care of a well-meaning friend, half with the yearning of a child, looking for a long-lost friend.

Then she disintegrated the millisecond before I could reach her, into fragments and droplets and molecules of sand and water and buckets and buckets of oil and plastic and metal and chemicals and algae, leaving behind nothing but a putrid smell and a heart that ached.

I let out a soundless gasp, fingers outstretched, and I turned abruptly - where did she go?

And there she was, in the corner of my eyes, and in the shadows of the alley, a sad, forlorn figure, looking mournfully at me, hands wrapping around her own figure protectively, shards of plastic and metal impaling her pale, harsh figure, and I ran towards her, wanting to save her from whatever doom she is facing, but she faded away again.

Over the next few days, she appeared again and again and disappeared just as quickly as she appeared.

In the corner of my room on the building of glass I made, staring mournfully at me over the grunts and mutters of the suits and ties in my room, and I stared at her helplessly, absently fiddling at the plastic hanging down my neck, fingers itching to soothe the pain somehow,

but not really knowing how, and she'd disappear again.

Or when I'm in the reflective suit, clipboard in hand, overlooking the newest mound of sand and stone to be shaped, or when I'm zooming past borders to city after city filled with light and light and buildings that scraped the sky, fingers splayed against the windows, she'd appear again, drifting in the corners of the cabin I'm in, remorse oozing from every inch of her figure.

She came and went, and desperation slowly filled every inch of my being.

What happened to the girl? What happened to the mother? What happened to the joyous and calming figure that was once at peace with the world and herself?

I rubbed calloused hands furiously against my eyes.

A straight-faced steel machine honked me out of my reverie as I stood in the middle of the road, staring into nothing.

"Get out of the way! Daydreaming in the middle of the road" A nameless voice zoomed away in clouds of black smoke and dust, and my throat seized up as I choked on the thick, thick air. The black smoke clogged up the corridors in my lung, and for a moment, I thought I was drowning, drowning, drowning and -

And it hit me.

I spun around, hoping to catch a glimpse of the figure that has grown so familiar in the past couple days, but the search was in vain. I realised with a growing sense of fear and trepidation that I was standing on *"reclaimed land"*.

I sprinted back to my office with a renewed sense of purpose. I suddenly knew with an unwavering sense of certainty what I had to do, what I needed to do, not only for me or for the young girl that I once knew, but for the countless little girls and boys who have been robbed of the chance of swirling and dancing and skipping with their little girls and mothers and splashing under the sun's warm guidance.

I knew.

Standing now, in front of a room of suits and ties and glares and expensive watches, the determination I felt suddenly ebbed away and gave way to uncertainty.

How do I tell them of my determination to bring back the young girl and mother? How do I tell them of the warm times spent, of the fire that's starting to burn inside me, stretching and expanding and dying to recover the image of the figure I once knew? How do I open my mouth, and get them to feel what I feel, and do what I want to do, not when what I want to do would lose them several buildings of gold and some trenches of wealth?

"I'm -"

The bravery that the determination bestowed upon me suddenly deserted me. I shifted onto another leg, fiddling with my shirt, suddenly not so certain of what I was going to say anymore.

A soft breeze alerted me to a sudden presence by my side.

I looked over, and a hand, filled with grim and soil and sediment and oil was outstretched at my side. My eyes traced along the arm and reached a gentle, encouraging gaze that looked warmer than ever despite the pieces of broken glass floating inside it.

I felt a lump in the back of my throat. Here she was, my young friend and the mother all wrapped up in once, standing tall and strong, and offering me support while being scratched and broken, and cast away and abused by many who relied on her and her grace.

Here she was, offering me her support, while I stood strong and healthy, with nothing stopping me but myself.

I reached out and took her hand.

The instance I took her hand, something shifted in me and her, in our little room and

in the planet. Her arm looked a little clearer, and the scratches lightened a little. It wasn't much but –

It means the world to me.

A voice spoke softly into my head.

Nodding my head and blinking away the stubborn tears that had come from nowhere, I stood taller, and cleared my throat. There was a sense of approval and relief emanating from the hand holding me, and gripping it tighter, I finally felt at peace with myself – a peace that I haven't felt since I was twelve.

Twenty-one, was when I held the hand of the ocean again, and began making changes.

Twenty-one, was when I finally saw beyond myself and my own grievances.

Twenty-one was the catalyst I needed in me.

Today, we are all twenty-one.

Xin

Western Academy of Beijing, Liu, Alicia – 17

Shin

In the waiting room, he had to fill out a questionnaire. It was the summer break after the sophomore year of college. The lazy air was saturated by the scent of flowers in full bloom, sticky and sweet like honey. But the air conditioner buzzing away in the corner cut through Shin's sweatpants and hoodie like a knife. He shivered. Shin hoped desperately to be in *The 1990s*, a cozy café tucked into a nameless street corner. He closed his eyes and tried to picture his favourite spot in the corner beside the big window, with the owner's cat snoring on the windowsill and scratchy music from the black record player. *Maybe if I think about it hard enough, I'll get there.* He could almost hear the click of the vintage lamp as it turned with a tug and flooded his little corner with amber light. *Please bring me back.*

Shin opened his eyes and felt the stab of the harsh clinical light. He sighed and tried to move the chair closer to the coffee table. But his knee hit the table, causing it to vibrate and make a series of sharp clinks with the vase on top. Shin looked up at the receptionist, but she wasn't watching.

Out of all things, the first question on the questionnaire was about breakfast. *Continental Breakfast. Bakery Basket (Choice of 3): Butter Croissant, Cinnamon Roll, Toast.* There was also American, Cantonese, and the slightly dubious Steel Cut Oatmeal. He only wanted Cinnamon Rolls. It reminded him of the ancient Christmas traditions he read about in history. It brought out a feeling of safety, old photographs, children's laughter and crackling fireplaces – although real fires barely exist anymore, and even Shin had rarely seen them. Maybe at one or two weddings of AI moguls or movie stars. The government regulations and costs were too much trouble to get past except for the extremely vain. Shin thought cinnamon felt like the realest thing in the world.

But he didn't want to ask for three cinnamon rolls, because then, he'd fall perfectly into their expectations. *Aw, the poor rich boy. Normal-people-things just isn't enough! Better give him his rolls, in case Daddy sues us!* His pen pierced through the paper and made a dark line on his pants with a ripping sound that, in the silent room, sounded like the Concorde taking off. He dropped the pen. He hit the table again while sitting up after picking it– this time with his head. The water inside the vase sloshed around. He looked at the receptionist again, relieved to see her minding her own business. But then, Shin swore he saw a slight, suppressed smile flash across her lips. He felt his face heat up and knew his pale cheeks were probably tomatoes by now. *This is why I'll never be like my father. Or brothers.* They were smoother than the expensive cars they drove.

You would like your breakfast to be served at... Shin thought for a few minutes, and scrawled down "15 minutes after waking." Life was like this for Shin. He treated even the most inconsequential decisions treated with the utmost formality– he had to. This let him at least pretend that some things mattered. All the important decisions in his life had already been made for him. All that was left for him to do was decide things like whether he wanted his coffee black or with milk.

A personal nurse will be on-call 24 hours for the duration of your stay. However, the doctor will inspect your recovery at least once a day. What time would you like the doctor to make these visits?

Shin was not a morning person. His father had talked to this college – the best in Cantonesia – to explain why he could not take classes before lunch. Actually, he sent an Email on his dad’s account.

Shin wrote, “after breakfast.” *So 13:00 at the earliest.* But he was worried the food filling his stomach would make him look fat. He changed it to 15:00 instead. *Wait, what if I have to use the bathroom in the middle of an inspection?* He crossed it out and settled on 17:45.

When would you like to receive visitors?

Shin couldn’t think of anyone that would visit him.

Would you like us to provide any additional forms of entertainment? Each hospital room is equipped with a 5G television with streaming services, as well as the newest iPad Pro 60.

Blank. Shin was 1990 to the bone. He’d bring his entire tattered Kafka short story collection along. Maybe some Balzac too. The organ surgery ward seemed a good place to brush up on *La Comédie Humaine*. He pondered on the poetry of re-reading *The Country Doctor* – from both authors – after surgery felt almost pleased. He decided he’d bring a bunch of other books. *Probably the most important things in my life.*

I think you mean “the only” important things – Shhhhh, Voice in My Head, humans can’t take too much reality - You know it’s true - Yeah, but does that mean I have to admit it?

We normally advise times surgeries beginning at 03:00 for the greatest success. Please let us know if that is inconvenient.

Blank. Shin returned the filled questionnaire to the receptionist, who gave him a dazzling smile. “Now, there’s only one last thing for you to decide.” The receptionist handed Shin a thin booklet. “We’ve compiled a list of candidates. Please have a look and select the one you find the most desirable.”

Mia

The fish landed with a thump on the deck. Its flopping sprayed up droplets of seawater that blurred into a thin mist, filling the air with tiny rainbows. Sunlight and wind danced and tinkled on its shiny scales. I thought the fish looked like a jewel pinecone– alive, organic, and growing, yet hard and unyielding as a diamond. Not that I’ve seen real diamonds. Or jewels. Or pinecones, for that matter. Still, I wondered. How long did it hang by its tail, sleeping on a crystalline tree, before being picked by fishermen? My eyes glanced over its body, and when I looked into the eyes, I found something there holding my gaze. I felt a surge of a need to peek behind its scales. What mysteries did its shiny body envelop? What treasures? What stories? Sometimes, I think everyone deserves a book to be written about them. But I wouldn’t be brave enough to look. What if I peeled back the scale only to find more scales under scales. There’d be no lungs, no heart, and no soul. Like a bamboo shoot. Like a Christmas present made entirely of wrapping paper. Nope, I couldn’t do it.

“This pretty boy will fetch a nice price, don’t you think?” I gave the fish a kick, and with a sick clunk, it slid painfully across the deck and stopped. I kicked it again, feeling the heaviness of through my boots, and it dropped into the ice compartment below. The streaks of its blood that painted the rust on the deck felt vaguely romantic.

“I mean, it might’ve. Actually, it probably would’ve. But now that the thing looks like we scraped it across a cheese grater, I don’t think so.” Andrew said.

“Oh no! Guess that now it’s all ugly, they’ll sell the meat at supermarkets instead for

people to *eat* instead of ending up as an entertainment break for those wedding party guests. Think of that! Actually, feeding people instead of going in for the looks.”

“Yeah, you’re basically Robin Hood. Or Marl Karx. I must have led the people’s revolution in my past life to have a sister like you.” Andrew was grinning. My grin spread and matched his. Yeah, that’s my brother. The same height and build as a basketball player but milder than sweet Japanese curry. I think I’ve always been the Sichuan hot sauce of the family.

“I offer thee my most sincere thanks.”

Andrew struck an exaggeratedly melodramatic pose. “But, Mia! What are they going to do now? You know, they need a break from doing all that mental gymnastics, pretending like they what they’re talking about. No one expects anyone to know anything about fish. How *could* you! How absolutely horrid! That’s like sending a missile into a field of oil. Ruthless.”

“Yeah, I know. Sometimes I have my doubts too. But you know, you just have to pull through. Just think of that American president and drive on. What’s his name again?”

“Donald Trump.”

“Ah, yes.”

The wind tickled Andrew’s hair. The dying sunlight painted his brown strands a glowing red. Did he know that he deserved only the best, the *very best*, of this world?

But I felt our conversation tonight to be strained. Did he feel it too? Maybe the sudden awareness of the uncertainty of how many conversations we had left between us made everything seem too serious. Kind of dumb, isn’t it? The more important something becomes, the harder we make a conscious effort to enjoy it, to savour the moment, and then the harder it is actually to do that.

Our conversation trailed off into the waves. We shared each other’s presence under the heavy turquoise sky.

Shin

After Shin settled back into the uncomfortable leather chair, he saw a paper jammed in the booklet. *The 10 MUST-Knows of selecting a suitable candidate.*

1. We assure you all candidates have been sifted for safety. The decisions you make would be mostly ‘cosmetic’. Many happy client testimonials talk about a gut feeling!
2. Though scientifically inexplicable, our scientists have discovered a post-surgery personality change with a strong correlation between the manifesting traits and the disposition of the candidate. The important the organ is, (i.e. heart compared to the kidney), the more severe the effect.
3. We’ve found opposite genders to have the greatest success rate. It is theorized to be due to the attraction between remaining pieces of the soul, which existence has been confirmed by scientists at Peking-Hong Kong University in 2111.
4. Although no effects on surgical results have been observed, the social class, age, occupation and relevant background of candidates have been provided for your convenience.

... Shin skimmed over the pages of bland description and unremarkable faces. No, he didn’t really want *Joe Skinner*, 70, the lobsterman to be a part of him. He didn’t even know what part – his parents wouldn’t tell him. Shin grew up as one of those fragile children who ended up at the hospital every few days. His parents always hid the reason. He’d gotten a lot better since he’d graduated from secondary school, so he was pretty sure it was a small problem that more or less solved itself. He didn’t really think the surgery necessary. *A perfectly healthy son just fits my parent’s vision of a perfect family.* So he went along, like everything else. They probably

found a physical fault to blame for his soft-spokenness and literary aspirations. *Maybe this is all just part of the immortal game to make me become ____ tycoon like all the men in my family.*

Mia

It's been seventy years since the announcement of the Autonomous Region of Cantonesia. *A brand-new era of prosperity! The best of three worlds.* Faces from my textbooks told me about optimism during the early years. It would be the hub of everything from microchips to shrimp dumplings. Expert predictions of grandeur rolled across the bottom of every news channel for weeks. Spirits flew light and high like sparrows in the spring wind, as people poured all their youth and vitality into the mold of dreams. Of course, there were successes. There were those who moved to glittering penthouses, who hosted golden parties with holographic dining rooms so that you had entrée in a snowy Milan and dessert under the Eiffel tower. Cantonesia is an economic miracle that churned out wealth faster than the world could understand.

Well, the Floaters are un-successes — the collateral damage. No one knows when they started calling us Floaters, but it's fitting. Our houses float on the New Causeway Bay, made of rickety bamboo sticks, wood, mossy Styrofoam, faded buoys, and basically anything that floats. As the observant reader has surely noticed, we're not too picky. We float between real life, never taking up a real job, never owning a real home, filling the crevices of the city. Dotted here and there like beauty marks, our we only add allure to the glamorous face of Cantoneisa.

Ten years ago, two lines on a white stick scared my dad away. "He never belonged with us anyway." I guess I broke the deal: I anchored him to the floaters. He wanted was to be free- if only one stolen night at a time. So he cut off the ties and drifted away. Sometimes, I want to drift away too. But I take one look at Andrew and Caden, and that feeling blows away like dry sand in a typhoon. It doesn't matter they don't share the same dad. Actually, it's better, like they only contain parts of myself I like. Brave, beautiful Sharon. Not some cowardly baby in a man's suit.

Oh look, there Caden is. Arms waving, jumping up and down by on the planks. Andrew and I yelled his name and waved back.

Shin

The name Mia Dempsey caught Shin's eye. Maybe it was the wide grin, slightly crooked teeth, elfish ears and the fiery look in her eyes. Maybe her sun-kissed skin and brown hair flying in the wind. *Floater. 21. National Board College Examination: 791/800.* Same as me! It felt a little like fate. He returned to the smiling receptionist.

"Mia Dempsey, please." Shin hoped her fearlessness would rub off on him a little.

"Wonderful choice. The process will commence in three days. An attendant will now lead you to your room. Please make yourself at home."

Mia

Caden and Andrew tumbled outside on the deck.

Sharon and I sat in the corner of our living room, watching them through the wispy door curtains.

We can't afford college for me. I probably flunked my exams – after taking them two years early to begin working, competing against those elite boarding school kids is like throwing an egg against a rock anyway. The results come out a few months later, but I'd start working tomorrow, as a janitor at the nearby hospital. Sharon felt like I should at least wait for

the results. “Scholarships don’t exist anymore, but we might find a sponsor.”

I might not be dumb – at least by Floater standards – but I’m not sponsor-material either. But I knew Andrew and Caden were something else.

Shin

It’s one day until Mia becomes a part of Shin. Strangely, no matter how much Kafka he read, he can’t slow my heart down. Those eyes. If only they’d let him talk to her.

Mia

Andrew slammed his fist into the wall. I thought our entire boat would flip. Caden was in the corner, studying for his Examinations now.

It’s been three days since I returned home with a bandage on my face and a hole where my right eye was.

“It’s nothing much, just another work accident.” The words sounded fake as they slid through my lips. Someone let out a dumb, high-pitched laugh. Oh. It’s me. I began blabbering about my idiotic co-worker Spencer. It was easy: he doesn’t exist.

Did they figure it out already? The mysterious accidents and magically lucrative jobs.

Weeks into janitor’s work, a voice in a corner told me to think about a deal. Over six years, I’d be filed into the Organ Donor Candidates List. If anyone picked me, I’d trade a part of myself for my brother’s education. If I made it through the years, I’d earn... a lot of money. Too much to mention – it’ll easily to send my brothers to college – maybe even myself.

The dizziness and appetite from blood loss could be easily explained. Then it went from ear cartilage to back skin to ovaries to a kidney. Harder to explain.

The eye was too much. *They knew*. But the reality was too horrible to admit it. Of course, my vision would’ve been affected. I can only take the lowest paying jobs now. Stupid! Even if I made it through the six years – and I was so close – I’d never have my own life. I will just disappear. The holes inside gnawed at me. I felt such disgust at them, but more at myself.

When the notice for the heart transplant came, Caden was a few months from the university. On the bus to the hospital, I felt only calm.

“Late today? Got a boyfriend now, do you?” The old street food hawker by the hospital teased in good humour.

“How did you know?” I forced a laugh. The holes shook and threatened to collapse.

The sunlight shone on my egg waffle with oozy strawberry fillings. I splurged today. In the sun, the waffle was a fiery red, like Andrew’s hair.

Sorry, Andrew, Caden, and Sharon. I’ll be your sister and daughter again in a better life. I’ll love you better – promise.

Shin & Mia

They lay there side by side, broken in their own ways.

Hands full of metal hovered above them. Both Mia and Shin were both wheeled in after breathing in the sweet chemicals. They’d never see each other’s faces.

The surgeons discovered the cavities while operating and knew in a second what the girl went through. Afterwards, when no one came to claim the body, they ran Mia Dempsey’s DNA through the database. If only they could find her parents, at least to tell them a comforting story. There were two matches of age.

Sharon Dempsey, Floater.

Stanley Dempsey. Shin’s father.

Shin

Shin reclined in the hospital bed, with a basket of three cinnamon buns. He thought about the fiery eyes.

I feel braver already!

Future Adventures of The Greater Bay Area

Yew Chung International School Secondary, Chen, Chia Yi – 16

The year was 2035. Millions of people sit in their homes, eyes fixed on their screens. The ceremony was about to begin. This cool October morning marked the beginning of a new era, one where Guangdong, Macao and Hong Kong became one. This was the start of the Greater Bay Area.

“That will be 234 GBD, just scan the code on the desk to pay.” Gu Yun said to the pot-bellied man behind the counter. He waited patiently as the man fiddled with his phone in an attempt to pay. He looked to the collection of demonic looking antique dolls sitting on the counter, their soulless eyes staring into nothing. Why someone wanted to buy one of those things was still a mystery to him, but there was a high demand and he – being one of the only antique sellers in the area – needed to provide. After scanning the code on the man’s phone, he wrapped the antique and handed it over the counter. The man took it and stumbled out of the shop with the wrapped doll tucked under his arm. Shortly after he left, Yun glanced at the clock and said “Close shop”, which gave the signal for the shop’s AI to lock the door and flip the sign from open to closed. He sighed and leaned back against his chair, business had been rough these couples of months, he didn’t know if he would have enough revenue to make it through the year.

His eyes landed on an old antique rotary phone sat on a display stand in the corner of his shop, probably dating back to the 20th century. The phone was simple, unassuming, made of black plastic with a gold number plate engraved with swirling patterns. It had been sitting in that corner ever since he took over his parent’s shop. No one was really into old electronics anymore so it had been sitting in the corner for over 20 years collecting dust. Maybe it was time to take it off the shelves and put it to rest in one of the various storage boxes behind the shop, but there were more important matters to deal with now. Standing up from his seat at the table he picked up his tablet and began walking around the shop, cataloging items and inspecting them for damage. He occasionally stared longingly at the restaurant across the street serving local delicacies such as roasted suckling pig and the best Portuguese seafood rice in the entire Pearl Delta, counting down the minutes before he could finally close up shop and go eat. He had just finished inspecting a selection of antique cigarette cases when he heard a faint ringing sound. He walked over to his desk to check his phone and realized that no one had called. He glanced over at the antique phone sitting on the stand. It couldn’t be, right?

Hesitantly, he shuffled over to the phone that was sitting on the display stand in the corner, wondering if that ringing sound was just a figment of his imagination. As he stepped closer, he found that it was actually ringing. How was this possible? Looking around, he saw that the phone was not even plugged in, with the end dangling inches from the bottom of the stand. Who could possibly be calling? He stood there for a few moments, staring at the piece of plastic, pondering if he should pick up. “Well, what’s the worst that could happen right?” he thought to himself as he picked up the phone and held it up to his ear.

“Hello?”

“Hello? Who’s there?” came a gruff voice on the other side of the line.

“I should be asking you,” Yun replied, shocked that he was actually talking with someone on the other side. “Who are you? How are you calling me?”

“This is Detective Lu Yi With the Hong Kong Police force” said the voice “The phone I am using to talk to you now was found at the scene of a murder that occurred 2 years ago at small house located near Tai Po. The victim Bai Ling-Ling was found dead in her home on May 30th 2017. I would like to ask you some questions regarding it.”

What was the Hong Kong Police Force? He thought, Hong Kong hadn’t existed for more than 70 years now and how could two years ago be 2019 if it was now 2100? The person on the other side clearly had to be insane.

“What are you talking about?” he replied “there hasn’t been a Hong Kong for almost 65 years. If this is some form of a joke or scam I’m not buying it.”

“Sir, this is not a joking matter, there has been a murder and any valuable information you could give us could help us track down the person who committed it.” He said somewhat irritably, the tone of his voice creating a crackly noise over the line, “So please cooperate with us.”

“But you said you were from – wait, what date is it today?” he asked.

“Today is the 7th of May 2019, what other date would it be?” He said somewhat confused, as if the answer did not bring up even more questions to the table.

“But today is the – wait one second,” Yun turned to the tacky digital calendar plastered onto the wall. “Today is the 6th – no wait, the 7th of May 2100.”

The person at the other end suddenly went quiet, the silence was deafening as he waited for a reply. He tapped his fingers nervously on the table, pondering if he should hang up. He was just about to place the phone down when the voice returned. “If what you’re saying is true, then that means I’m calling eighty something years into the future.”

“And I’m calling into the past.” Yun replied.

“This doesn’t make any – how is this even – You know what?” he said, slightly exasperated, “I’m not even going to question this. If the movies can do it, why can’t I?”

“This is quite shocking to me too.”

“After all these years, life still finds a way to surprise me.” Detective Lu said with a chuckle. “Tell me then, did they ever solve the case of Bai Ling-Ling? Did they find eventually find enough evidence to convict Hu Ding Quan? You must have records or articles of some sort right?”

“I can help you check if you want, just give me a second.” Yun said, gingerly placing the phone onto the table. “Keyword search. Bai Ling-ling.” the projector popped up from his desk and proceeded to project the screen above his desk. Skimming through the various results, he picked up the phone again “I’ve tried searching it up but I think it happened too long ago.”

“I guess I was expecting too much, it would be too easy to have this case solved in seconds.” he said with a disappointed sigh.

“How long has this case been going on for?” Yun asked

“2 years, 6 months and 5 days.” Detective Lu replied, “we should have caught him years ago but we didn’t have enough evidence to convict him, probably fled the city by now, it’s what I would do.” he said with a sigh “I thought I could finally put this case to rest when I found a letter at my desk, saying that I should come back to the scene of the crime. When I got there, I found a bright pink sticky note with a phone number attached to the landline telephone.

“So the sticky note wasn’t there before?” Yun asked, quickly searching up a photo of a landline telephone. It was a large chunky thing with two wires sprouting out of it, so different from the sleek and compact phones they had today.

“Of course not, I may be old but I’m not blind.” he scoffed, sounding annoyed. “Records showed no sign of the note at the scene, therefore, I decided to use the landline to call the number and here we are now.”

“Maybe you could tell me about the case, going over it may give you a new perspective.” Yun said.

“I don’t think this will work, but it can’t hurt to try. Grab a piece of paper or something, you can note down some important parts when I talk.” he said in an almost patronizing way.

Grabbing his tablet, he started typing as Detective Lu began. Normally, he would have hooked up the shop’s AI and make it record down and sort the details for him, but antique phones don’t connect to the 7G network. Therefore, he painstakingly typed down the information, praying that he didn’t miss anything important.

“On the morning of May 30th 2017, we received a call from a distressed boyfriend who had just come into the house and found his girlfriend – our victim Bai Ling-Ling – dead in the living room. The boyfriend – whose name is Hu Ding Quan – claims he had come by after he received a call from her telling him to come over, only to find her laying on the living room floor with no signs of life. When we got to the scene of the crime, we found the victim lying on her back, with a distinct red marking across her throat and the surroundings undisturbed. It was later determined that she had died from strangulation, but we were unable to find the murder weapon.”

Yun was frantically typing down the details. “What did the marks on her neck look like?”

“They looked like a series of interlocking strands in a uniform pattern, sort of like individual rings hooked together to form a long piece. The pattern seemed to be around half a centimeter in width and there seemed to be a larger marking in the center of her throat where both of the strands met. There were no distinct traces left behind on the victim’s neck from the weapon.”

“It doesn’t sound like a rope,” Yun turned towards his tablet and began searching for possible things “probably isn’t a piece of cloth, maybe it could be ...” his eyes landed on one of the antique necklaces sitting in front of the store “could it be a necklace?”

“That’s what we thought at first too, but we went over all of the jewelry pieces she had and all other potential necklaces that we could possibly think of but none of them were able to produce the same markings, we also tried all of the potential things that you could use to strangle someone but they all failed.” Yun heard a loud thump on the other side of the line “All of the evidence we collected points to Hu Ding Quan being the murderer but we just can’t find a murder weapon to convict him.”

“I know this sounds cliché, but how’s life in the future anyways? where do you live? What do you do? Detective Lu asked

“I live in Nacre, somewhere around the center of the Pearl Delta section of the Greater Bay Area. I run an antique shop in one of the older parts of town that was opened by my grandfather, he started off selling some of the stuff that came along with the property and he slowly got into the antique business.” Yun paused “I’m not actually not really sure what to say, life’s pretty normal.”

Detective Lu chuckled, “Your future sounds awfully different from what their trying to tell us now, this point in history is filled with so many conflicting comments about the Greater Bay Area, ranging from it being described as “heaven on earth” to it being the worst decision we’ve ever made.”

Now it was Yun’s turn to feel amused “I don’t think it would be much different than where it is now, everything’s just more efficient, less border crossings and more technological advancements.”

“By the way, where’s Nacre? There’s no place in the world named that at this point in time.” Detective Lu asked.

“Uhh... not sure, let me check,” Yun turned towards his screen “I think It’s what you called Tai Po back then.”

The line on the other side turned silent. “Hello? Hello? Are you still there?”

“Any chance that your grandfather was alive during 2019?” Detective Lu asked.

“I think so, why do you ask?”

“Because I know this property is about to be demolished soon to make way for a new building, with a lot of potential buyers.” he said slowly, “If your grandfather was the one who bought it, any chance that there could be some stuff left over from the previous owner?”

“There may be, I know that they never changed some of the buildings foundations I could go check for you. What are you looking for?”

“Something hidden in a secret compartment or something, try looking at the walls or floor.”

“Ok, I’ll see what I can find, but don’t get your hopes up.” Yun said skeptically as he placed the phone down onto the table.

He walked into the back room of the store and went down the stairs into the lower storage portion of the store. The room contained a random assortment of trinkets, items and furniture, stacked high on shelves and piled on the floor. He didn’t know if how was going to find anything in this mess but he slowly started feeling along the walls and floor, knocking on them and searching for cracks. Although the bottom level of the shop was never changed, the wallpaper of the room had been replaced a few times due to the humidity. Some of the corners were starting to peel, revealing the concrete walls. He was just about to give up when he saw a tiny red marking that peaked out from behind the wallpaper, peeling it back, it revealed a red streak on top of what looked like a hidden drawer. After many attempts, he finally managed to get it open, covering his hands in concrete dust in the process. In the compartment was ... nothing, not a single thing. He reached back into the compartment, feeling around until his hand caught on a cool piece of metal, pulling it out, it looked like a metal clasp of some sort, made of a rose gold material. Attached to it was a ring-shaped piece made of a similar metal, around half a centimeter long.

Running back up the stairs and into the shop, he hastily picked up the phone again.

“I know this sounds crazy, but I think I found it. Check if there’s a basement of some sort, there’s small compartment in one of the walls.” Yun said.

There was a loud clatter, followed by the echo of footsteps. Detective Lu’s voice came over the line again a few minutes later: “I can’t believe it, the chain looks exactly like the patterns on the victim’s neck, I have to get this back to the department for testing fast. Thank you. You don’t know how much this means to me.”

“Glad I could help,” he said with a small smile. “Call me again if there’s any other cases you need solving.” he joked

“I will. I guess this means goodbye then,” Detective Lu said, voice thick with emotion. “Best of luck.”

“You too.”

Across time, Detective Lu hung up the phone and stared at the necklace in his hand, the missing piece of evidence. He dug around in his bag, producing a red paint marker, heading down into the basement, he added a red streak to the door of the compartment. Satisfied, he walked up the stairs and out of the house, closing the door behind him.

Fiction

Group 6



Macau the Las Vegas of the East

Korean International Springboard, Kwan, Jordan – 13

The name Macau is thought to have been coined through a misunderstanding by Portuguese seafarers when they first arrived on the island. They asked the locals for the name of the land, but the locals misunderstood, and answered with “A MA-GAU”, thinking that the Portuguese were asking for the name of the temple called A-MA. From there, the Portuguese took ‘A-MA-GAU’ and the territory officially became known as Macau.

Macau have approximately 38 casinos. Some of them are located in Macau, Peninsula and some are in Taipa Island. The biggest casino is the Venetian Macau. Some casinos that I visited are Wynn Palace Macau, MGM China, Grand Lisboa Macau. All of them are giving free drinks once you enter their casino but you cannot take it out. During night time you can see different beautiful lights surrounding the casinos. There’s a lot of different entertainment inside and outside the casinos. There are also different luxury shops inside the casino.

Don’t forget to eat the Portuguese egg tart when you visit Macau. It will remind you of the culture of Portugal. You need to try their Portuguese seafood rice, prawn tartar, almond cookies and sweet pork jerky.

Another thing is the historical places in Macau, some of the structures were built in the 19th century like the Dom Pedro V theatre, it was built in 1858 and is the oldest theatre in Macau and was the first Western-style theatre to open in China. Another is the Ruins of St.Paul, it was built in the 16th century but burned down in 1835 leaving only its very large and beautiful facade. Next is A-Ma Temple and is believed to be the temple from where Macao’s name comes from. It’s the oldest temple in the city.

When you are in Macau you feel you’re in two places because every name of the street and all of the business advertisements are written in Portuguese but you are in China.

Fiction

Group 7



Traveling in Hong Kong by MTR

Korean International Springboard, Lin, Athena – 14

Hong Kong is one of the world's most convenient places to travel, thanks to its network of MTR stations, it is easy to get around the city, but now this network has made quick access to China possible. This city, as it made its way back to China, has built numerous connections to the country and in this essay, I will be covering a few of them. I would also be talking about the transport inside Hong Kong.

The MTR was started on October 1, 1979, during the Hong Kong's time as part of the British Empire and consisted of 93 stations, from the beginning of its debut, it's been popular among travelers of all kinds as it was a quick, safe and comfortable way to get around the city. Originally, the MTR wasn't the only railway service in Hong Kong, the city also had its own transit system, the Kowloon-Canton railway corporation. Eventually, in December of 2007, the two railway companies merged with one another, creating a new era in Hong Kong's railway development. The merged company had ten railway lines combined and promised to improve the quality of service.

In 2018, the first connection to China through trains was introduced to the public. Hong Kong's residents could now comfortably and efficiently travel to China without much hassle, running from Hong Kong West Kowloon, this high-speed railway connects the city to China's high-speed rail network of over 29,000km in length and 58 stations. This year, travel between Hong Kong and China has become easier with the introduction of the High-speed bullet train running from Kowloon to places all around China. Hong Kong has anticipated the the train's debut since 2018, when construction was announced.

The MTR also operates the Airport Express, a fast link to the city's airport and conference centre, AsiaWold Expo. This High-speed railway runs between Airport station, Hong Kong station, Tsingyi, Kowloon station and, previously mentioned, Asia Wold Expo. This transit system takes 24 minutes to go from HK station to the airport and yes, it is popular among tourists as well as locals.

The Hong Kong Boy Who Liked Black

Korean International Springboard, So, Kirsty – 15

There was a 16 year- old boy named Chris who grew up in Mong Kok all his life. He was lazy and had no passion about anything except shopping for cool things. And he loved the colour black. He had many things in black and always wore black clothes. Chris hated going to school. His parents were frustrated with him and wanted him to mature and think for himself, and care about things. So in June 2019, he joined the protests so that he didn't have to go to school and he wanted to wear black every day. But over the next few months as the Hong Kong protests became more violent, he began to realize the true meaning of the protests and he developed his own choices in his life. This is his story.

One day, in the morning Chris was going outside to meet his friend's, because his friend's life was the same as Chris's. His friend liked going to the protests, but his friend didn't like to listen to his parents. So Chris and his friends went to the protests together until night time. His Chris' parents didn't know he had gone there and tried to call him. But when he went to the protest, he turned off his i-Phone, and didn't hear when his parents called him. At night, Chris went back home, he saw his parents were very angry, because they didn't know where he went. So Chris said to his parents " I'm just going to the protests with friends and protests can make me have choices in my life and family is not important in life". He complained that his family gave him no choices in his life. Then Chris got very angry with his parents, and ran back to his bedroom to pick his stuff up than he left his family home. Chris called his friends and said "I'm going to stay in your home, because I will not be going back to my home and not staying with my parents and tomorrow we can go to the protests". Back at his house his parents opened his bedroom door, they looked for Chris, but Chris had packed the bedroom and all his stuff had gone away. Chris's mom and dad were very worried that he had left his home and gone away because they didn't know where he had gone or who he was staying with or who would take care of him. His parents called and called Chris, but when they called him, even though he missed them he never talked with his parents on his phone.

Later that week in the morning, he went to a protest with his friend and they were stood outside Mong Kok MTR station, then they put some oil and fire outside of the MTR station, soon the police got there. When they got there the police said for them to stop, but they kept doing it until midnight. At midnight, Chris and his friends with other people went to the shopping center to break the store and they put the fire in the cafe and it burned. The police said to Chris and his friends to stop, but they tried to block the road didn't let the police catch them. Chris started to think about what he was doing, "Why am I so bad to the police" he thought "maybe I should I should just let police catch me". After this Chris decided to give himself up and went over to the block to talk with the police.

At home, Chris's mom and dad saw Chris on the TV, they heard the phone ring, then Chris's dad picked up the phone and heard the police officer. The police officer said "your son is in the police station can you pick him up?" After his parents picked him up, they went back home and Chris wanted to say something to his parents. He said sorry to his mom and dad, because he understood that on that day he did something very wrong. It took me a while to

figure out that family and school are the most important thing in my life. “But can I have my own choices in my life mom and dad?” his parents said “yes but don’t do wrong things again and don’t go to the Hong Kong protests again.” His parents found a different school for Chris and they wanted him to make many good friends and learn from this experience. After two weeks at his new school Chris went back home and told his parents “I love the new school, and I have made so many good friends.” At school, I have been learning lots of things and study lots of things. Now, Chris knew the bad things are not important in his life.

The Chronicles of Hong Kong: The Voyage of the Greater Bay Area

Korean International Springboard, Wai, Kaden – 13

Long ago, in 1789, the three heroes Thomas, Ming and Zheng ruled over Guangdong city. They brought great joy and prosperity to the city. But the three heroes and the King and Queens from the last battle had decided that the 11 cities including the farther cities Guangzhou and Zhaoqing should be named the Greater Bay Area since the 11 cities were close to the South China Sea. Everyone agreed and had a large celebration. The first maker of fireworks Shi Shi launched fireworks into the sky. Everyone was amazed. In 1801, they didn't have any wives to marry, so they wanted to live together. In 1802, they had three German Shepherds called Lightning, Thunder and Buster. The three were used for battle. But mostly they would play with them. Until, one day a terrible lightning storm caused severe damage To Guangdong City. "This storm is getting more dangerous every week!" said Thomas. "I agree" said Ming. "Someone must be attacking us" said Zheng

After four months, they decided to take a large blimp with missiles, bullets, and a large laser gun to Guangdong. The team had an army of their own with 60 soldiers. The team was going to find out what was causing the problem. But first Thomas had to do something. "I need to go to Taiwan first." he said. "Why?" said Zheng "to take back the throne from my uncle. He tried to kill my father's closest friends. The 7 lords of Huizhou. No one has ever heard of them since" Thomas said. Until the captain Rottenbeard who was one of the blimp's crew said, "Sir, we reached Taiwan. At sunset, they were getting closer to Taipei. "The island of Taiwan" Ming said. "Hmph. Not a Greater Bay Area flag in sight" Shi Shi said. "I thought Taiwan was always the Greater Bay Area's" said Zheng. "I decide we should use planes." said Thomas. "Good Idea" said Rottenbeard. So they took 8 planes down to the ground until at last they made it. "We're in Taipei." said Zheng. "Are you sure you remember this is the city where your uncle lives Thomas?" said Ming "Yes" said Thomas. The dogs came to sniff around the place. Then, the tower started to chime with a BANG. The team was about to shoot their crossbows but it was just the bell. "Crew, guard the planes and be on guard and if we don't come back by dawn, send a search party." said Thomas. The dogs came with the team. Later on in the morning, they came towards the large tower with seven large bells. "You dogs stay here. Be on the lookout." said Thomas. They went inside. It was all rusty and old. Then, they saw a book with tons of names with large numbers next to it. "Who are these people?" said Ming "Why have they been crossed out?" said Zheng. "Slave Traders." said Thomas. Then there was trouble. One of the bells rang and it came down "LOOK OUT!" said Ming. It was Thomas's uncle and he had an army. The heroes fought them with swords and crossbows. But as they continued fighting, Owen's uncle carried the three dogs with his sword right next to them. "Unless you want to hear these dogs whimper again, I'd say you'd drop your weapons. "The dogs whimpered "NOW!" he said. So they all dropped their weapons slowly. "Put them in irons" said Thomas's's uncle. Thomas's Uncle placed the dogs in irons as well. "Get your hands off me!" said Ming. Thomas, Ming, Rottenbeard and Zheng were sent to the market. Listen to me you ruthless fool. I am your king!" said Thomas. One of the men hit Zheng in the face. "You're gonna pay for that!" said Zheng. Then, the evil

king of Taiwan called Emperor Zhao came and said “Actually, someone else is going to pay... for all of you.” They were at the market and were trying to escape then an old man named Lorn Bern came by. “It’s you! Oh thank god you’re still alive.” said Thomas. He recognised the old man from his youth. “You need to get out of here” said the old man otherwise you will be fed to the green mist. Suddenly large pieces of green mist started to zoom above the sea in the distance. The green mist covered a boat out on the water and when it cleared the boat and the people had disappeared out of nowhere. “What happened?” asked Thomas. “It’s a sacrifice” said Bern. “Where did they go?” asked Ming. Bern didn’t know where they went. But there was worse to come. No one in Taiwan knew where they went either “The mist was first seen in the east. Reports of Fisherman and Sailors disappearing out at sea. We men made a pact to find the source of the mist and destroy it. They each set sail... but none came back.” But... Bern said something even more serious. “Listen, if you don’t sell yourself to the slave traders, you’re likely be fed to the mist.” he said.

The auction began and men were going to pay by calling out numbers. One man said “I bid 60.” The second man said “80” The third one said, “90!” the fourth man said “100” The fifth man said “120!” the sixth man said “150!” Until no one said anymore bids. Thomas’s Uncle called out “Any more bids?” No one called out numbers so they were sold and one of the men took them away.

As they were being taken away they managed to overpower him. Thomas choked the man. “Get the keys, Bern!” he said. Some of the people from the houses came out to help and fought them back. Meanwhile Emperor Zhao ran to the Blimp and tried to cut the string. But luckily Thomas came down and shot a crossbow at him. Emperor Zhao fell into the water where a shark bit him and tore him up in half. “Didn’t see that coming.” he said. Meanwhile, everyone was cheering for the heroes who saved Taiwan. Now let’s get out of here said the three heroes. Life is much easier in the Greater Bay Area. So they got in their blimp and flew back to China.